

603487

NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE

By the same Author :

SOMEONE MUST DIE
QUESTIONABLE SHAPE
QUISLINGS OVER PARIS
THE KNIFE WILL FALL
STEPS IN THE DARK

Another triumph for Saturnin Dax

NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE

by

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

HURST & BLACKETT LTD.
LONDON - NEW YORK - MELBOURNE
Publishers since 1812

*The characters and place names in this story
are entirely fictitious and have no reference
to any living person or place.*

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by C. Tinsing & Co., Ltd.,
Liverpool, London, and Prescott.*

TO
JOHN CHANCELLOR

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. "PALELY LOITERING"	7
II. SATURNIN DAX TAKES CHARGE	9
III. CUSTODIANS	16
IV. RELUCTANT GUEST	22
V. CRIME AND CREAM CHEESE	24
VI. DEATH'S DOOR	28
VII. CLUES	37
VIII. DETECTED DETECTIVE	43
IX. THE WIDOW	47
X. SATURNIN DAX DISCUSSES	52
XI. TRIALS OF AN EXILE	58
XII. THE POLICEMAN'S LOT	61
XIII. SATURNIN DAX IS AMUSED	64
XIV. CAFE DU THEATRE	68
XV. SOMEONE HAD BLUNDERED	71
XVI. CAT AND MOUSE	75
XVII. IMAGINATION AND THEORY	77
XXVIII. IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE	81
XIX. MACABRE	85
XX. THE MISSING PHOTOGRAPHS	93
XXI. ACCORDING TO PLAN	97
XXII. RENDEZVOUS	102
XXIII. LATE UNLAMENTED	105
XXIV. ANOTHER PART OF THE WOOD	111
XXV. HOUSE-WARMING	116
XXVI. WAITING	124
XXVII. PRESTIDIGITATOR OR POLTERGEIST ?	126
XXVIII. EAST MEETS WEST	130
XXIX. A CHAIR ON THE BOULEVARDS	137
XXX. RECONSTRUCTING A CRIME	139
XXXI. CHINOISERIE	141
XXXII. PRISONER'S STATEMENT	146
XXXIII. ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN	149
XXXIV. THE ELUSIVE PASSENGER	153
XXXV. OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE MADE	156
XXXVI. SAIL AND FAREWELL	161
XXXVII. SATURNIN DAX REVEALS	165

CHAPTER ONE: "PALELY LOITERING"

"The moral effect of being without a settled abode is very wearisome."
—HAWTHORNE.

ON the morning of Sunday, September 28th, at daybreak, two cyclist police patrolling the 8th *arrondissement* of Paris encountered in the Cours la Reine a man who signalled to them and appeared agitated. When the two *agents* dismounted, this man, who looked like an unemployed workman, stated that his name was Pierre Degray. His brother, Albert, acted as night watchman in the Lorrain-Prad Bank, nearby. Pierre was anxious. He had come to this quarter, walking all the way from Montrouge. It was a matter of raising some money. Pierre was out of work. Albert had promised a loan if his brother would come to the Bank about seven in the morning. In point of fact Pierre had been turned out of his rooms, unexpectedly, for not paying his rent. He had walked the streets half the night. He had slept for an uneasy hour or so on a bench in the Cours la Reine. At daybreak he thought to attract his brother's attention, perhaps to anticipate the loan by a couple of hours and to get some coffee and bread . . .

At this stage of a slow and uninspired narrative, Pierre Degray was interrupted and impatiently questioned by the two *agents*. "What was the trouble? Why worry the police with this history of down-and-outs and petty loans?" Pierre continued, dogged, and unrattled by authority. He was anxious because, though he had walked up and down in full view of the bank, and though he had whistled several times, in a manner that his brother would recognize, yet Albert had not given any sign of life; he had not come to the little side-door, or . . .

"Asleep," said the first agent, with a shrug.

"Evidently," agreed his colleague. "A good *métier*. I could now do with some sleep myself."

"Wait until seven o'clock, my friend; then you will see your brother."

The *agents* prepared to remount their cycles. Pierre Degray continued.

"Also I am anxious because, when I first approached the Bank, I heard a sound which I thought was a motor-tyre bursting. I think now it may have been a shot. My brother never sleeps on duty. He is very conscientious. It seems very queer . . . Also I saw a man, hanging about here, and a motor van that drove away. Also I have found that a cellar window of the Bank is broken."

The cyclist-police descended once more to earth.

"Show us, and quickly, species of a cretin."

"The Credit Lorrain-Prad is in the Rue de la Conference," volunteered the second *agent*. "Backs on to the river. A likely spot, *hein* ? "

The second *agent* did not state for what purpose such a spot was a "likely" one, but his confrere nodded grimly and with understanding.

With Pierre Degray between them the policemen wheeled their bicycles along the Cours la Reine, turned towards the quays, and came to the large, rather impressive building of stone, which was the Bank. It presented outwardly a scene of frigid dignity and sabbatarian calm. The great bronze portals were closed and obviously inviolate. There were bells, one marked "Night Bell ;" and the *agents* halted, in brief hesitation.

"First, this cellar window," said the first *agent*, making his decision. "Where is it ? "

"Round at the back. Facing the river," said Pierre Degray. The three men went on, turning twice to their left, whilst a pale lemon sunlight began to illumine the Seine, and a tug was heard hooting, and market-carts rumbled over the Pont de l'Alma.

"There. You see . . . ? "

Pierre Degray pointed to a small window on the pavement level. The glass of the window had been neatly removed. Two iron bars had been cut, and another was twisted out of its position.

"*Sapristi !* "

The policemen had their cycles propped against the kerb. One took a torch from his pocket and looked down into the cellar. He could see an old battered desk, which looked as though it had been recently placed there in position.

"I am going down, you stay here."

"Careful, Charles. There may . . . "

The *agent* called Charles laughed softly, squeezed through the window between the bars and landed on the desk below. His movements were quick and quiet. There was a revolver in his hand.

He disappeared, and was gone for some time. Pierre Degray was muttering to himself and the second *agent* was growing anxious when suddenly Charles reappeared.

"Give me a hand."

He was pulled out, through the cellar-window to the pavement. His face was pale, probably from excitement. He beat dust from his neat uniform which looked almost new.

"Well ? You have discovered something ? "

Charles nodded grimly.

"Three dead ones. Two without coats but with gloved hands and with burglar's tools beside them. Both shot through the head. A third, with a lamp. The night watchman, no doubt, but we shall make sure." He looked at Pierre Degray, who was pale and trembling.

"My brother is shot dead ? Ah, *mon Dieu !* "

The two *agents* looked at one another.

"There is no one down there now, Charles ? "

"No, I think not. A safe has been ripped open, and the contents taken. There is blood beneath this cellar window. At least one man got away."

Again the two *agents* looked at one another, then at Pierre Degray, then across the road to where a public telephone-booth stood on a corner.

Charles spoke.

"I'll 'phone headquarters. Wait here, just a little moment."

He went off briskly. Pierre Degray leaned back against the wall, and then slid down until he was finally squatting on his haunches. There was a look of misery upon his face.

CHAPTER TWO : SATURNIN DAX TAKES CHARGE

*"On the main promenade just at the wrong time ;
You'd come upon his scrutinizing hat."*—BROWNING

COMMISSAIRE SATURNIN DAX, of the First Mobile Brigade (Judicial Police), stood in the extensive bank vault, illuminated none too adequately by electric lights recessed in the steel walls. Three dead men, and a safe overturned and with its back ripped out, presented a scene not too difficult to interpret. The night watchman had surprised the burglars: the three men had shot it out: all three had died in consequence.

The night watchman had died the hardest. He had entered the vault by way of steps leading down from the main building. After the exchange of shots Albert Degray had turned back towards the stairs, but, shot in the neck and the stomach, he had never made it. He lay, on his side, a vigorous, middle-aged man, turning grey. And, in a pool of blood, he had died with all his wounds in front. Beside him was a 9mm Mauser automatic.

Saturnin, with gloved hands, picked up the gun, gingerly. He smelt it, took out the clip, examined the whole length of the weapon narrowly, finally replacing it just where he had found it. As he straightened up he met the eye of young Brigadier Felix Norman who spoke.

"Pretty good shooting, eh ? He fired three shots, killed two men and wounded a third."

"Wounded a third ? "

"A third man certainly got away. The contents of the safe have vanished. At least one thief left by the cellar-window for there is blood showing the way he went, though no apparent finger-prints. Anyway, poor old Degray made them pay for their amusements."

Saturnin grunted, and walked over to the other two bodies. Both lay on their backs, and they resembled one another in their features

police, but that did not prevent his possessing considerable skill with a pencil.

* * * * *

Pierre Degray had a long horse-like face, anxious, gloomy, and rather stupid in expression. His clothes were not of a bad style or quality, though his linen was dingy, and all his appearance was unkempt. It seemed clear that he had not slept; nor had he shaved or washed. He rose wearily from a chair as Saturnin entered the little room.

"Good morning, monsieur."

"Good morning. This is a bad business, Pierre Degray. You were fond of your brother, *hein?*"

Saturnin held out his packet of cigarettes and the other accepted the offer, lighting up with a *briquet*.

"Albert was a good type. Quite a good fellow."

"He was not married?"

"A widower, monsieur. His wife died seven years ago. There were no children. Perhaps it is as well—now. What a tragedy, monsieur! Do you know who these criminals are who shot Albert?"

"We think we do."

Saturnin sat down and looked about him. This room was scarcely more than a cupboard. There was no window, only one chair, and an old high desk of a kind needing a tall stool. On this desk was a fragment of cheese, some bread, and a knife, on top of some white greasy paper. Over the desk a brass hook was let into the wall and on it hung an enamel mug. A battered thermos flask contained coffee which the Commissaire first sniffed at and then tasted. The two shallow drawers of the desk were empty, but he examined them carefully. Next he took the enamelled mug from its hook and looked at it.

"Did this usually hang on the hook here?" he asked.

"I can't say, monsieur. This is the first time I have been in this room, or, indeed, inside the bank-building."

Saturnin replaced the mug, and yawned.

"Well, my friend, we are hoping you will be able to give us some help, just the same. You have spent the night *à la belle étoile* it seems? As a consequence you were outside the bank at day-break or thereabouts?"

"Yes, monsieur, you see, I am out of work. For two months I have been out of a job, and for three or four weeks I have been unable to pay for my room. All my economies have gone."

"Where is your room?"

"In Montrouge. The Hotel Beausejour, in the Rue Louis Pasteur. The *patron* of the hotel is an imbecile. Unreasonable, monsieur. I told him I would pay him in eight days. For I start work on Monday. But the imbecile would not listen. Last night, at eleven, when I got to the hotel, they keep the door closed in my face. They won't listen to me. So I am *de la cloche*. All

night I walk about. I tried to sleep on a bench, near here, in the Cours la Reine."

"Why not go to a police station? You know that a *chomeur* who has no bed can be accommodated for the night."

Pierre Degray smiled.

"They say that, monsieur. I tried three stations, one after the other. Each was full up."

"Ah?"

Saturnin grunted and thumbed his moustache to left and right.

"Luckily, you have work again. You start to-morrow, eh? Where is that?"

"At Joinville, monsieur. I am a carpenter by trade. I have work in a film studio, at Joinville. The Super-Art Films Company begins a new production. I have worked for them before."

"Good. We will see you are not in the streets again, to-night. And now, my friend, you came in the very early morning, about daybreak, hoping to attract your brother's attention, isn't that it?"

"Yes, monsieur. I was cold, tired, hungry. If I could have seen Albert, all would have been well. The behaviour of the hotel *patron* was unexpected, you comprehend, monsieur. If I had thought..."

"Just so. Your need for money was suddenly made far more urgent. So you hoped to see your brother. You approached the bank. Was it dark?"

"Yes, monsieur. It was practically dark when I first approached the bank. I did not then really hope to attract Albert's attention. But what would you? I might as well walk around as pretend to sleep on a bench. Also, if I remained on the bench, I might be arrested for vagabondage. And I am a respectable workman, monsieur. That is understood, eh? I am a respectable citizen."

"Evidently. So you walked about, close to the bank. Did you whistle, or make any attempt to attract your brother's attention?"

"Not at first. Not until dawn was breaking did I begin to whistle. By that time I was getting desperate. I am not accustomed to spending the night in the streets, monsieur."

"No, no. Naturally. Then, this shot you heard? That was before daylight broke?"

"Shot, monsieur?"

"Didn't you tell the cyclist-police you heard a shot?"

"I said that I heard some sound which I thought was a bursting tyre but which might have been a shot."

"Or two or three shots fired more or less simultaneously?"

"Yes, monsieur, perhaps. The sound was muffled. Indistinct, you comprehend. Now, when I know what has happened, I think it must have been a shot from the cellar, there. Of course, at the time, I doubted of nothing. The sound, or sounds came just as I was first approaching the bank. I merely thought some taxi had burst a tyre."

"Yes. And there was actually some car in the vicinity, *n'est-ce-pas*?"

"I saw a car. Two or three minutes after I heard the sound resembling a shot. It was a light motor van. It stood at the back of the bank. There was a man standing beside the van. A little man. I thought he looked like a Japanese. But I could not see him very well. Though there was some light from an arc-lamp, his face was turned from me. He seemed to be blowing a whistle. But he couldn't have been doing that, for I heard no sound."

"What did you do when you saw this man and the motor van?"

"What did I do?"

"Yes, how did you behave?"

"I stopped, monsieur. I pretended to do up my shoe lace."

"Why did you do that?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"Did the movements of this man who looked like a Japanese, appear to you suspicious? Did you stop and kneel and play with your shoe-string because you wished to observe what had happened?"

"Yes, yes. I suppose that was in my mind. You see, monsieur, Albert being night watchman at the bank, any queer movement around there. . . ."

"Evidently. So you dropped to your knee, and you watched. What did you see?"

"A man joined the other by the van. Not a big fellow, but larger than the Jap—if it was a Jap."

"Where did this second man come from?"

"I did not see."

"From the direction of the bank?"

"Yes, I think so."

"That is from the cellar window? This lorry was near the cellar window, eh?"

"Yes, monsieur. Not far way. But on the other side of the road. Now, I come to think of it, this second man came across the road. There was something white in his hands—a handkerchief, perhaps."

"Was he wrapping it round a hand, or wrist?"

"Yes, yes."

Pierre Degray was rather excited, as fresh chords of a latent memory were played upon.

"This other, larger man was binding a handkerchief round his wrist. I remember. He had a corner of the handkerchief in his teeth."

"Good. Now, what did you hear?"

"Hear, monsieur?"

"Yes. There was a man you thought an Oriental. He might have been blowing a whistle, but you heard no whistle. What did you actually hear? Voices? Feet running?"

"No. No voices. I was too far away to have heard anything

but quite loud speech. I heard no steps. Perhaps they had rubber soles, but spoke in low tones. . . ."

Pierre Degray was scowling in an effort to recall his impressions, suddenly his face cleared.

"I heard the motor running. Yes, I heard that. Then the two men jumped to the driver's seat. The van came past me. I noticed something. At least, I am pretty sure. It was a laundry van, monsieur. The word 'laundry' was lettered, on the back and side of the car. But I did not see the name: only the word 'laundry.'"

"Good. That is quite good, Degray. And when did you notice the broken cellar window? Just after the car drove away?"

"No, monsieur. A good time later. Probably some twenty minutes or more. You see, I took little notice of the car and these men at that time. I was worried with troubles of my own. I was not thinking then of burglary or apaches. I retraced my steps, after the car passed me, and before reaching the cellar window, I went round the front. I longed for complete daylight. I hoped poor Albert would see me. I began to whistle; at first, softly, and then more loudly as my hunger and misery grew. Ah, *Mon Dieu!* And poor Albert was dead—murdered! It is terrible, monsieur. Terrible!"

Suddenly tears began to roll down the sallow, lugubrious face. Pierre Degray took out a dirty handkerchief and smeared his already soiled cheeks. His brother's murder, his own plight and sufferings, all were voiced together in a loud lament. Life was becoming impossible. Decent citizens were shot down by criminals. Other decent men who wished only to work and earn their bread, were not even permitted to do that. They were turned from their rooms, like common vagabonds.

Saturnin grunted, and drew a ten franc piece from his pocket. "Here, get yourself some coffee and bread. We will see that you have access to your rooms again, in Montrouge."

"Thank you, monsieur. Thank you, a thousand times. This ten francs is only a loan. I will repay, monsieur. To-morrow I start work again, at Joinville. . . ."

Felix Norman put his head round the door, and Saturnin went out to him. The Commissaire closed the door behind him, and sank his voice.

"Well, my boy?"

"The banker, old Lorrain, has arrived, and would like to see you. He is preparing a list of stuff stolen from the safe."

"Ah, yes. Well, take a note of Pierre Degray's address and also the place where he starts work, to-morrow, in Joinville. Verify the facts about his job, then see that he is allowed back in his Montrouge hotel. Presumably he has some luggage and effects; take a look at them. Anyway, we want him where we can lay our hands on him. Also take a look round for traces of a car. Particularly across the road from the cellar-window. Have enquiries made concerning a laundry van, driven by an Oriental. Has the surgeon arrived? Good. I'll see him later."

CHAPTER THREE: CUSTODIANS

"Les affaires? C'est bien simple: c'est l'argent des autres."

—DUMAS fils

IN an impressive office, seated at a massive desk, Edouard Lorrain, the banker, was an imposing figure. Tall, hirsute, with a fine head crowned by a mane of white hair and a large, square beard, he looked like a celebrity of the old school. He might have been a poet or sculptor of those romantic days when Victor Hugo reigned and Theophile Gautier's red waistcoat blazed in the van of the fight. And Lorraine dressed the part, for his large frame was draped in a dignified frock coat, whilst a high stock and cameo-pin showed beneath a red, vigorous-looking face. In his button-hole was the rosette.

He rose courteously, as Saturnin entered, and offered the Commissaire, a well-manicured hand.

"A terrible business, Commissaire. Poor Degray! With us for sixteen years, poor fellow. Shot down, without any real chance, though he revenged himself, eh! Will you join me in some tea? I have it here. One of the few good habits we have imported from England. Wakes one up. And I admit I find the hour drastically matutinal."

As Saturnin grunted an assent, the banker turned to a side-table where a stove and a silver tea-service were set beside some cups and saucers. Edouard Lorrain adjusted eyeglasses to which was attached a broad black ribbon.

"I brought along our manager, Neveux. He is now making a list of the stolen property, Commissaire. A large sum in negotiable securities has vanished, I fear. Several millions of francs, Neveux says. We are insured, of course; nevertheless the publicity following a robbery like this is very much to be regretted. It disturbs confidence, Monsieur Dax. A bad business. Will you add sugar and milk yourself?"

The banker placed before the Commissaire a fragrant cup of subtly-blended tea, into which Saturnin dropped five lumps of sugar and then added milk.

"Several millions of francs in negotiable securities in the small safe," said Saturnin. "And in the big wall safe?"

Edouard Lorrain grimaced, and stroked his beard with a white hand upon which was a cameo ring.

"*Touché*," he said. "You touch the spot, Commissaire. My own idea, and I have only myself to blame. But that never consoles us entirely, eh! I thought that if we kept our most valuable, negotiable securities in a small, old-fashioned safe, then robbers

would pass it over and attend to the big, imposing new safe. I was wrong."

He sipped his tea, took a little bottle of white capsules from a drawer, spilt two on his palm and swallowed them.

"I made a mistake. I shall have to admit that to my partner, Monsieur Prad, and to my son, Guy. To make matters worse, Guy thought nothing of my scheme. He advocated the biggest and strongest safe for the most valuable property. Now he can have the felicity of saying, 'I told you so.' Unless he is uncommonly generous he will point out that I have been over-subtle and therefore stupid. So, an old man is humbled before the young—a bad business. A cigar, Commissaire? I do not myself smoke, but these are good, I am told."

Saturnin accepted an excellent Bock cigar and lighted it.

"You are the head of the firm, I understand?" said Saturnin. "With you, as partners, are your son, Guy, and a certain Monsieur Stephane Prad—is that correct?"

"Perfectly accurate, Commissaire. And our managing clerk, Paul Neveux, who has been with us for over twenty years, was recently promoted to a directorship. An able man. Monsieur Prad has only recently joined the firm, six months after the death of his father. You may be aware, Commissaire, that my father and the father of Aristide Prad founded this private bank. My dear friend, Aristide, died some six months ago. I immediately got in touch with his son, Stephane, who was in America. He crossed the Atlantic to join us, and to assume the mantle of his very distinguished and honoured father."

Saturnin grunted.

"Keys," he said. "I suppose all partners have keys—to the safes, the bank-building, the vault?"

"Yes, I keep mine on a chain, you see? I have them here in my trousers pocket. They never leave that chain, Commissaire. Then a similar set of keys are in the possession of my son, of Monsieur Prad, and of Neveux. Neveux also keeps his keys as I do, on a ring and chain. As for. . ."

The banker broke off as a door opened and a tall, slender man of about thirty entered the room.

"Ah, Guy. You got my message then. Come and meet Commissaire Dax who is investigating our tragedy."

Guy Lorrain was elegant in grey clothes of impeccable cut and fashion. He carried a light overcoat which he threw over a chair. His face was white and harassed, but good-looking in a somewhat effeminate way. He had a round head, with fair hair plastered down, and parted in the middle. There was a considerable space between his small, close-lying ears and the top of his head. The forehead was high, the chin small and pointed. A monocle hung by its cord and lay upon his tweed waistcoat. There was a red carnation in his coat. He removed grey gloves and offered his left hand casually to Saturnin.

"This is dreadful," he said. "Dreadful! I passed through the vault, father. What a scene! Millions of francs stolen! At least one criminal got clear away. Perhaps more were concerned; they must be brought to justice, Commissaire!"

He pulled a chair to within a yard of the desk and sat down, after carefully hitching up his trousers. From a gold and platinum cigarette-case he selected a Russian cigarette and lighted it.

"Do you keep your keys on a chain?" asked Saturnin.

He looked at Guy Lorrain who was surprised by the abruptness of the question.

"What? Oh, the keys of the bank and so forth. Yes. Here they are, Commissaire. Never leave me, you might say."

Saturnin nodded.

"That makes three sets of keys, out of four, kept on chains and so always attached to persons, at least in their working hours. Good. Now, what about the fourth partner, Monsieur Stephane Prad, rather recently from the United States? Do you happen to know about his habits with keys?"

"I do," said Edouard Lorrain. "He keeps them sometimes in a pocket, sometimes in a drawer of his desk, sometimes lying on top of the desk in his room."

The old man's tone was dry, and his son grimaced ruefully.

"I see. Does that mean that Monsieur Prad is a little careless, or, shall we say, unorthodox in business routine and procedure?"

"Ha! Very well put! 'Unorthodox' is excellent!" exclaimed Guy. "Do your questions mean the thieves entered by obtaining access to our own keys, Commissaire?"

Saturnin looked at the long, firm ash on his cigar and then at the older banker.

"Well," said Edouard, in response to the look. "It is like this, Commissaire. Stephane Prad is, very possibly, not cut out for the rather dull grind and monotonous daily tasks of mercantile existence. He has led, in one country and another, an adventurous life. Sheep-farming in Patagonia; rubber and coffee in Brazil; land-speculation in various parts of the United States. Then he married a beautiful wife..." Edouard glanced at his son. "Very beautiful," the old man repeated. "And wealthy also, I believe. So you see, Commissaire, it is possible that such a life of movement, colour, and romance scarcely fits a man for the drab business of acting as custodian of other people's money."

"Very well put," said Guy. "*Seigneur Dieu!* Excellent phrases. Make me feel thirsty."

He laughed on a high-pitched note, rose quickly, went to the table and poured himself some tea. His hand was unsteady and he spilled the warm liquid over the silver tray.

Saturnin removed the ash carefully from his cigar.

"When did you discover this suggestion of business inadequacy in your partner?"

Edouard Lorrain shrugged his wide shoulders.

"I suppose I saw it within twenty-four hours of Stephane entering the bank. He had, years ago, told his father that such a life did not suit him. Mark this, Commissaire, I speak in strict confidence, and on no account would I have my words interpreted as disparagement of Stephane Prad. His father was my oldest and dearest friend. The son, in essential qualities of probity, of absolute integrity, is just his father over again. But at forty years of age he is too old to be trained for banking, whilst being not too old, it seems, to regard life as a gay adventure. In short, a delightful, charming, upright, but slightly irresponsible creature—irresponsible, that is, from the point of view of the banker, who must be as Cæsar's wife, at least outwardly. We may not be as austere as we look, but outward austerity is an asset. Nothing is more delicate, Commissaire, than the question of giving credit where credit is due." The old banker smiled and his son laughed shrilly.

"I think I understand you," said Saturnin. "Your old partner's son is of an adventurous disposition and has led an adventurous life. Past habits show plainly, and, in a respectable bank, his presence seems a trifle aberrant."

Guy Lorrain laughed once more.

"A pirate wandered into a prayer meeting," he said.

"Guy exaggerates everything," murmured Edouard. "You must understand, Commissaire, that there is nothing whatever against Stephane Prad. A rather exotic appearance, a romantic temperament, a breezy charm of manner—very well suited to almost any walk of life, except the banker's parlour. I confess to considerable disappointment. When Aristide died, a partnership was offered as a matter of course to his son. I had hoped that, in the years, Stephane would have changed his ideas. I had hoped this new partnership would be as pleasant and satisfactory as the old. Well, it is not always a matter of 'like father, like son'."

"You are disappointed, that one can readily comprehend. Have you taken any action?"

"You mean in order to dissolve a partnership unlikely to suit either side?" Edouard Lorrain stroked his square, white beard. "Not yet, Commissaire. As yet we have decided upon nothing definite. The son of my oldest and best friend, you comprehend . . . ? The affair is not one to be over-hurried. Something more than purely business considerations are involved. Not for the world would I be precipitate. I have, however, hinted to Stephane that he may find life in the bank an increasingly boring routine. And he seems to agree."

"He has expressed agreement, has he?"

"Well, yes, Commissaire." The old banker smiled, drily. "At least he enunciated the opinion that one can succeed in business only by failing in life."

Guy Lorrain uttered a kind of snort.

"A pretty remark to make! Do the bank a lot of good, if repeated, what?"

"As a consequence," Edouard Lorrain resumed, calmly, "I rather expect Stephane to come to me, sooner or later, and express a whole-hearted readiness to dissolve our association. I would rather not press the thing. I prefer that he takes the first definite step. After which it will remain only to discuss the financial side of the matter. Neveux has already been working, tentatively, on figures . . . Stephane might like a lump sum ; or he may prefer an annual payment, whilst remaining a kind of sleeping partner. Anyhow, whatever my old friend's son wishes, that, within reason, shall be his."

Guy Lorrain rose rather abruptly from his chair.

"Well, unless I'm wanted, I'm off," he declared. "Sunday, you know. Not my idea of the Sabbath, this! I get quite enough of a bank when I see it from Monday to Saturday."

Saturnin said nothing, but he and the older man watched while Guy crossed the room and picked up his overcoat.

"Going for a run in the car ? " asked Edouard.

"Well, yes. I thought of it. Unless there is anything I can do ? I'll see you for dinner tonight, I suppose ? "

The young man looked at his father, who nodded. With a final glance at Saturnin and a brief bow, Guy Lorrain went out of the room.

The older banker poured himself some fresh tea, and smiled. "The younger generation," he said. "They don't work as hard as we do. They are right. A lot of what we call work is merely drudgery. Some of us old fogeys have dulled our wits with too much office routine. Quite unnecessary. Guy is efficient, and he gets through an extraordinary amount in a short time. Of course . . ." the old man smiled again. "My son is just a little jealous of Stephane coming here. Not unnatural. Stephane's coming was rather like the return of the prodigal son. It produced much the same reactions, though of course Guy's position here could never suffer in any way by Stephane's presence."

Saturnin brushed his moustache to left and right with a meditative thumb.

"You can give me the address of Monsieur Prad ? " he asked.

"Certainly, Commissaire. He and his wife have a suite of rooms in the Hotel Monseigneur, in the Champs Elysées. They are looking for a suitable house, and live, meanwhile, in the hotel. But you will not find Stephane there today. He has the week-end habit—another English importation. I telephoned an hour ago, and Estelle, that is his wife, told me her husband had gone to the country. She did not know where . . ."

"Alone ? "

"Yes. I believe Stephane and his wife very frequently find their amusements independently. An American custom, possibly ? I don't know. They have their own groups of friends . . . The modern style, Commissaire. I believe they are happy, and good

friends, though of course that is not my affair. Ah, Neveux. Got that list? Come along, come along."

These words were addressed to a dark, sallow man who had entered the room after a brief knock. He looked the typical, prosaic bank manager, though rather younger in appearance than Saturnin had expected. Paul Neveux bowed to the Commissaire and placed on the desk some typed sheets of paper containing lists of figures.

"I brought along two carbon copies, Monsieur," Neveux said to Edouard. "I can make more copies if you wish. I fear, by the way, that Madame Prad loses some of her jewellery. Apparently it was left with us and deposited in the small safe."

"No, no. I think not, Paul. I fancy she took it out again. My son took it out for her."

"Ah, good! Women think a lot of their trinkets, eh?"

Neveux smiled in a cold, ironical fashion. Then his expression changed. "But, all the same . . .! Our losses are heavy! What a calamity! Who would expect thieves to open that old, small safe when . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes!" said Edouard Lorrain with a sudden burst of irritability. "Don't fuss, Paul. You're like an old woman fussing and pointing out the obvious! Give me two of those lists there. You won't need more than one, Commissaire? Good. Here you are, then."

A few minutes later a desk telephone rang, but the message was for Saturnin. The police surgeon and the technical staff had both been examining things in the vault, and the Commissaire's presence was now desirable. Saturnin rose. But before returning to the vault he inspected the private office of Stephane Prad. It did not greatly resemble the sort of room that serious business-men occupy. Some framed photographs of magnificent horses hung on the walls. There were further equine snapshots in Prad's desk, and one showed the man in the dress of a gaucho and mounted on a pony. Prad's office, in fact, suggested activities remote from the world of banking, and the drawers of his desk were filled with incongruous, unbusinesslike possessions. There were no keys, as the Commissaire scrupulously ascertained. On top of the desk a framed cabinet photograph bore the name of a Paris photographer. It showed Prad standing behind a chair in which a woman was seated. Prad had one hand resting on her shoulder. The man's face was handsome in a devil-may-care fashion, and he looked straight at the camera with a smile that Saturnin found enigmatic. The woman's expression also was not easily to be read. A proud and beautiful face; perhaps rather a hard face, with the look of one who has asked a great deal of life, and, in consequence, may easily be disappointed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RELUCTANT GUEST

"Crime is a classification of social behaviour relative to the social status of the individual, the place in which he lives, and the time at which he lives there."—LANCELOT HOGBEN.

As Saturnin entered the cell the prisoner scrambled clumsily to his feet. He was tall, only a couple of centimetres shorter than the Commissaire, and broad in the shoulders. The prisoner's complexion was white and pasty, his hair a nondescript brown, his eyes shifty and cunning. He wore the look of a man who is naturally stupid, but who assumes an appearance of craftiness as a kind of "protective colouring".

"Well, Jesick," said Saturnin. "So you have dropped in to see us again, eh?"

The white, foxy face reddened.

"See here! You *flics* think you run the earth, but you don't! I want to go out of here. And I'm going. You have got nothing on me."

"Have a cigarette, Jesick?"

"To hell with your cigarettes!"

Saturnin sighed and exhaled smoke.

"You know, Jesick, people so impatient of restraint as yourself ought to be more careful of their mode of living. If . . ."

"You've got nothing on me. I know your ugly mug, you're Commissaire Dax, aren't you? Listen, you can be made to sweat for this. False imprisonment. Defamation of character. Why, I can get all sorts of money out of you for this. What am I supposed to be in for, anyway?"

"I thought you might tell us that, Jesick."

"What are you getting at? Listen, I want a lawyer."

"You caused a disturbance, fighting with a taxi-driver. You were carrying a pistol which you ought not to be carrying. You also have in your possession tools only used by housebreakers. Brigadier Flach says that . . ."

"He's a dirty liar! He's got it in for me. He'd tell any lies to get me put away for a stretch . . . He planted the things on me, the . . ."

There followed a string of obscenities. Saturnin listened unmoved, but he watched with interest the transformation which came over the crook's stupid face. The man was no longer a figure half-comic, half-contemptible. As he swore, his face flushed with passion, he looked cruel, dangerous, rather horrible, in an evil, dehumanised fashion.

"Jesick!" said Saturnin, suddenly. "When did you last see Jean and Maurice Rolla?"

The prisoner stopped short in his stream of filth and abuse. A change came over him again and the colour went from his face. His mouth shut like a trap and his eyes quickly evaded those of Saturnin.

"When, Jesick ?"

"I don't know. A month or two ago, I suppose."

"Or a day or two ?"

"No. That's a lie. It's weeks—months—since I saw them."

"But you know what they are planning, eh ?"

"Planning ? No, I don't, I tell you. I haven't seen them for months. I got nothing to do with them."

"Why are you so anxious to deny knowledge of them, Jesick ?"

"Anxious ? I'm not anxious. I'm just telling the truth. You ask me a plain question and I give you a plain answer. Matter of fact, me and Maurice Rolla didn't get on together—see."

"You had a quarrel ?"

"Well, yes, you might put it that way."

"About what ?"

"What the hell has it got to do with you ?"

"Why did you quarrel with Maurice Rolla ?"

"About a girl, if you want to know."

"Then you wouldn't mind telling me about this job they had on for last night, Jesick ?"

"Job . . . ?"

The crook's cunning little eyes narrowed to mere slits. His pale face grew even paler.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"You knew nothing about the attempted burglary at the Lorrain-Prad Bank last night, eh ?"

"I don't! And listen. You cannot fasten anything like that on me. I was in here, wasn't I ? Very well, then."

"Yes, it looks rather convenient. You're here, Jesick. You may stop here for quite a long time if you're not wise. Come! You know a burglary was planned for last night. The plan was to enter the Bank by a cellar window. What about keys ? Who looked after that side of the business ?"

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

The prisoner turned away and, crossing to a narrow bed, sat down on it. Saturnin followed him relentlessly.

"We can keep you here a long time, Jesick."

"I wasn't in any burglary, was I ? How could I go busting a safe and be here at the same time ! Think I'm a sacred Houdini ?"

"Who said a safe had been bust ?"

"You did. You said burglary at some bank, didn't you ? That means busting a safe, doesn't it ? Listen, you can't put stuff over on me like that. I want a lawyer."

Saturnin sighed.

"Pity. We can hold you a long time, and it's delightful weather outside ; a little autumnal, but charming. I am not accusing you

of taking part in a burglary. I didn't say there ever had been a burglary; I spoke of certain plans. Plans for last night. They may have gone astray. In any case, it is obvious you had no active part. So why be so obstinate, Jesick? Why not tell me what you know about the Rolla's plans, and who was with them. Then the world is wide and *la vie est belle*. We don't really want to hold you."

The white-faced man looked quickly at the Commissaire and then away again. He was biting the nails of one large hand and scowling in fierce cogitation.

"Listen," he said at last. "Maybe the Rolla brothers did plan a raid on a bank, and maybe it was for last night. I'm admitting nothing, mind you; I say 'maybe'. I'll even go so far as to say that I might have joined in if I hadn't met that son of a mangy camel, Flach. I say I might; I don't say I would. But, anyway, you can see for yourself I wasn't in any safe-smashing job last night, because I slept, or tried to sleep, on this sacred donkey's breakfast here. I know nothing, Commissaire. That's straight. They planned the job on their own, and I know nothing about it. Maybe they got someone else working with them; I don't know. I swear that on the head of my mother!"

"All right, Jesick," Saturnin said. "I'm rather inclined to believe you." He turned towards the door of the cell, and the prisoner rose to his feet with a cry.

"Here! I want to get out of this. You've got nothing on me. Listen, you can't hold a . . ."

The door of the cell closed upon his expostulations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CRIME AND CREAM CHEESE

"Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage sans doute."—LA FONTAINE

WITH bread and teaspoon skilfully wielded, Saturnin Dax tracked down and secured the last fragments of cream cheese and apricot jam remaining on his plate. He wiped his lips, took the napkin from his collar, and smiled across the restaurant table at his friend, Max de Leon.

"An excellent dinner, Max. Excellent!"

"Good!"

The Jewish stockbroker, with the white hair, and the blue monocle marking the place where an eye had been prior to 1914, smiled in satisfaction. He caught the eye of the *sommelier* and ordered coffee and old brandy.

"Sensational affair, this—at the Lorrain-Prad Bank," De Leon commented. "Three dead, eh? Several millions of francs stolen, I am told?"

Saturnin nodded; then he made a deprecating gesture.

"I am in charge of the case," he said. "And of course I telephoned you just to make use of you once more. I . . ."

"Please!"

The stockbroker held up a broad, white hand.

"There is no need to talk nonsense, my friend. I am heavily in your debt. And, in any case, I suppose you merely seek a little information. I only hope I can furnish it. Question of finance, or financiers, eh?"

He offered his cigar-case and the two men lit up.

"I am," said Saturnin, at length, "interested in the Lorrain-Prad Bank. It is a private bank, I understand. Founded by the fathers of old Aristide Prad and of Edouard Lorrain. Aristide is dead. Old Edouard is not. The present directors are, old Edouard, his son Guy, a former manager, Paul Neveux, and the son of Aristide, that is Stephane Prad, whose position however is a little vague at the moment."

De Leon nodded.

"That is correct, as far as I know. The bank has always had a high reputation, and is considered one of the best of the small, private affairs. Old Aristide was an astute financier. So is Edouard. They avoided the trouble that beset most of us after the big American smash. Astute and cautious. 'Patient-Money Prad' we used to call old Aristide, whom I knew well."

The waiter came with the coffee and the *sommelier* with the *fine champagne*. The brandy was sipped appreciatively. Saturnin dropped five lumps of sugar into his coffee.

"'Patient-Money Prad'?" he questioned.

"His favourite phrase. He always contended that bankers were in too much of a hurry. 'There's a great need, to-day, for patient money,' he used to say. 'The production of real solid wealth is more credit-worthy than the production of shoddy. We bankers should back agriculture, scientific research, and so forth, at least as much as we back films, artificial silk and so on. You can't eat cellulose.'"

"A wise man!" commented Saturnin.

"What about old Edouard? Does he believe in a cautious, long-view policy? And, by the way, is it really good banking policy, however good it may sound socially and otherwise?"

De Leon nodded.

"You make a point. For my part, I think old Prad was right. We French must support the soil, whatever course more industrialised nations may prefer. I fancy old Edouard agreed well enough with his partner. Though, in his youth, Edouard Lorrain was a bit of a fire-eater!"

"Truly?"

"In quite an honourable way. He was something of an idealist. As I have said, I never heard anything against the old partners of this firm. But some thirty years ago Edouard Lorrain ran a financial journal called *Le Veau d'Or*. You may have heard of it, once?"

"I think I have. Made a special feature of exposing frauds, if I remember right?"

"It did. Edouard Lorrain edited the paper himself. The job was no sinecure. He had to fight at least three serious duels."

De Leon looked around the restaurant which was emptying as the hour grew late.

"But you won't be interested in the past generation, so much as the present, I presume?"

The one functioning eye of the stockbroker looked keenly at his friend.

"That's so, Max. Though any kind of information has a trick of proving useful in my job. Actually this case looks pretty straightforward. Burglary, and a night-watchman killed, besides two crooks. We know the two dead burglars. But one person, at least, got away, and we don't know him, or them. Also the steel gate of a bank-vault is opened apparently by its key. Question: how did the burglars get access to the banker's keys? Someone has been a little careless."

"I see."

Max drank some coffee thoughtfully.

"Of course you know the type of petty crook who comes into offices with some bogus inquiry in order to snatch any unconsidered trifle. I can't tell you anything new in such matters. Sometimes such fellows deal in keys, eh? They wouldn't take on a safe-smashing job, but they'd sell to people who would, perhaps?"

"Evidently. But banks are not like ordinary offices, Max. It would be easier for the camel to do the needle's-eye trick than for a small-time pilferer to enter a bank-director's private sanctum. He wouldn't get past the counter and its metal bars."

"That's true."

De Leon looked at the ash on his cigar.

"You are not suggesting one of the bank-directors helped to burgle his own bank?"

"Well, it's a wicked world, Max. A manager has recently been promoted to directorship—that's Paul Neveux. A younger director is being asked what he will take to quit or to become a mere sleeping partner—that's Stephen Prad. Said to be adventurous by disposition. Also young Guy Lorrain seems rather to dislike Stephane, which may mean complications."

De Leon smiled.

"Perhaps I can explain the last point. Prad has a very attractive wife."

"Ah! Guy has fallen for his fellow-director's wife? That might add quite a dangerous element."

"I have heard," said De Leon, carefully. "Heard, but can't sponsor the statement, mind you, that Estelle Prad finds *le beau* Guy attractive."

"Slightly epicene," suggested Saturnin. "Sex of one and half a dozen of the other. Incidentally, I don't like the look of him."

De Leon shrugged.

"Some women might. Estelle Prad is perhaps just a little masculine herself. Not in superficial appearance. I don't mean that. But the lines around the eyes and mouth suggest a commanding nature—assertive, shall we say? Perhaps she would like to mother Guy; to guide him in the way he should go?"

"And Stephane Prad? Is he the bold adventurer type, Max?"

"Well, no woman is likely to boss Stephane Prad, I fancy." De Leon laughed. "I don't know much about him, but he looks more like a sailor or a gypsy than a banker. There's a kind of 'you be damned' look in his eyes. Perhaps Estelle tried to boss him, and failed. Perhaps they want a divorce . . . But we seem to be getting a long way from common-place safe-smashing, aren't we?"

"No doubt."

Saturnin finished his brandy with relish.

"Yes, it is unlikely that any of this affects my case. All the same I am glad to have all the information I can get. When business men are careless they give us a lot of trouble. Keys left about; cheque-forms, or the figures of safe-combinations. I hope there's no young bank-clerk making a fool of himself. That's the kind of case I hate."

"Yes," agreed De Leon. "Very disagreeable. The young fools don't last long. For one thing they feel they must spend the money they get. But, couldn't this door, or whatever it was, have been opened by a skeleton key?"

Saturnin shook his head.

"A skeleton key would leave certain markings on the lock, Max. No, either an authentic key was used or an impression was taken from one of the director's keys so that a new one could be cut. The available evidence suggests that Stephane Prad alone was to some degree careless with his keys. There are other points . . . We know two of the crooks in this affair; two brothers, named Rolla, who were shot dead. Now those men never swerved by a hair's breadth from their habitual way of working. They entered buildings by cellar-windows just as surely as they had a supper afterwards of pork pie and potato salad. And they also got at keys, wherever possible."

"Curious this orthodoxy!" said De Leon. "Since the criminal is a social rebel one would expect unorthodox behaviour. And, of all walks of life where imagination is needed, surely that of the crooks is certainly one?"

"Probably we never hear of the crook who possesses real imagination," Saturnin suggested. "The Rolla type spend half their life in gaol. Their sort work hard for about fifty francs a week. But, last night, or early this morning, someone got away. At least one fellow, and with a lot of stuff. He seems to be unknown, and I want him badly. Presumably he got at the key of the vault door, but not at the keys of the safes. There are

points, you see. Did all the bank-partners have the same keys? How many crooks got away from that vault? Seemingly one fellow And there was another outside, possibly an Oriental, waiting with a motor-van."

"I saw that in the evening journals," added De Leon. "You accept Pierre Degray's story then?"

Saturnin shrugged.

"Provisionally. He didn't invent. He might be mistaken. His record is dull but honest. Last night he tried hard to sleep in his hotel, at Montrouge, but they wouldn't let him in. No—Pierre Degray is for nothing in the affair. But someone with far more brains took a hand . . ."

The men finished their coffee and liqueurs and De Leon paid the bill. In the stockbroker's big limousine Saturnin was driver to his home in Meudon Val Fleury, where he slept uncommonly well, following the abbreviated slumber he had known the previous night.

But, the next day, about noon, the Commissaire received an additional item of dramatic news. Stephane Prad had, it seemed committed suicide. In a little villa at St. Remi, the banker had burned charcoal in a closed room and so suffocated himself. The man had not died alone, for a woman named Clemence Bouque was found lifeless beside him. In fact the affair had all the appearance of a lovers' suicide pact.

CHAPTER SIX: DEATH'S DOOR.

"Let me glide noiselessly forth;

*With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper,
Set open the doors, O Soul!"*

WALT WHITMAN.

THE red sports car of Felix Norman shot through the main street of St. Remi and slackened speed in sight of a little pink villa that peeped out coyly from amid a group of slender birches. Before this house stood a uniformed gendarme who saluted as Saturnin complainingly eased his great bulk from car to road. Felix Norman followed. The two men passed through a gate and up a garden path flanked by godetias and sweet peas. Saturnin paused for a moment to gaze at the house, constructed more or less on Swiss chalet lines. Wooden shutters painted green stood out in vivid contrast against the pink walls; flower-bowls filled with fuchsias hung in a snug porch.

"Quite a love nest, eh?" said Felix.

Saturnin grunted and walked on, to be received in the doorway by the local Sub-Prefect. This official was an old acquaintance of Saturnin's, and some moments were spent in courtesies. How was Madam Dax? And the children? There were five now, were there not? Good! With the Prefect all was well, save a touch

of rheumatism. So talking they came into the villa, and the Sub-Prefect, a melancholy man with a long, thin moustache and sentimental eyes, became business-like.

"The doctor has made his examination and there seems to be no doubt about it being suicide. The bedroom was filled with charcoal fumes when Helene, the maid, returned at eleven this morning and found them dead."

The Sub-Prefect sighed.

"A sad affair. Little Madame Bouquet was much liked here in St. Remi. Pretty—very pretty. Young, amiable, delicious. La, la, la! If life is not good when one is young, it's a bad look-out, eh?"

"The maid found them this morning, at eleven?" said Saturnin.

"A little late. Was she instructed not to call them before eleven?"

"No, Helene was given the day off yesterday. She was told she could go into Paris, and, if she wished, stay the night with her parents. Nothing unusual there. When this Monsieur Prad came, Helene was often sent off in such a way and given a handsome *pourboire* into the bargain. She quite understood. These lovers like to be alone, eh?" The Sub-Prefect sighed again. "Even in death, it seems!"

"Helene is here to be questioned, of course?"

"But, yes. She is here. The doctor went home, but he is at your service, when required. He says death was certainly caused by carbon monoxide gas. You will see for yourself—there are the unmistakable signs. They stopped up the door, closed the windows tightly and burned charcoal. But first they took with their coffee, a drug: one of the barbiturates, the doctor says. There will, of course, be an autopsy . . ."

They passed through the little hall, ascended a staircase and now paused before the door of the bedroom.

"Behold!" said the Sub-Prefect, dramatically. "The portals of love and death!"

The door of the bedroom had been opened but it now stood almost closed. Pinned to the door by a black-headed pin was an envelope upon which the words had been inscribed in English and in block-capitals.

Attention! Charcoal Fumes.

The verdict should be: suicide whilst temporarily sane.

"Witty to the last," said the Prefect. "I saw only a little of Monsieur Prad, here in St. Remi. He called himself Dupont, by the way. It seems he was married and consequently had to be discreet. But he was always amiable and gay. Always very gay!"

"Why should he write in English?" asked Felix Norman.

"Practically his native language," Saturnin explained. "Lived fifteen years, or more, in the United States. Does Helene, the maid, speak English?"

The question was addressed to the Sub-Prefect, who nodded.

"Quite well, I understand. And so did poor little Madame

Bouquet. She once spent much time at Cannes and Nice, and they might be called British colonies, no ? "

Saturnin grunted.

With a gloved hand he carefully removed the envelope and examined it. On the flap, at the back, the words: "Hotel Monseigneur, Champs Elysees, stood out embossed in blue. The Commissair looked closely at the envelope, back and front; he looked at the black-headed pin, some four to five centimetres in length, and then he put the envelope into a cellophane envelope and carefully into his pocket-book. The pin he stuck into the lapel of his coat. With the toe of his boot he sent the door swinging gently inwards, and, standing on the threshold, he looked within.

The room was feminine and coquettish in the extreme. A harmonious arrangement of pink and white, the white Louis Seize bed with its pink coverlet being plainly the most important article of furniture. Despite the open windows an odour of expensive perfume was evident and prevailed over all other scents. On the walls hung some charming dry-points by Louis Icart. Other pictures, mondaine and mildly erotic, rather crowded the walls: a mistily rosy "Departure For Cythera," and some less delicate photographs. A couch was covered with extravagant dolls of the kind sold in expensive cabarets. There were some photographs of minor theatrical celebrities, signed with flourishing signatures beneath tender dedications. A light writing desk had two great pink quills lying on a pink blotting-pad. On a small table, in an alcove, was the remains of a meal set for two people. Nearby, an elaborate anthracite stove had its nickel, screw-down top conspicuously absent, this heavy disc of metal being set on the floor beside the stove. On top of the stove was a brown coffee-pot.

"Helene, of course, opened the windows."

The Sub-Prefect made the statement almost in a whisper. The three men, standing in the doorway, were impressed despite all their experience of crime and violence. Perhaps they were rather moved by the very absence of violence, by the pitiful air of tenderness and intimacy contrived by a little courtesan who had found death amid these rose du Barry fripperies.

The ancients were accustomed to address Venus in a whisper, for she was the goddess of Death as well as for Love. The Sub-Prefect of St. Remi lowered his voice as he explained the open windows, and added that nothing else had been touched.

Saturnin glanced behind the door and saw some solidly rolled newspapers. He picked up a roll, noted the titles and dates of the journals, and dropped the roll again; then he crossed to the bed.

"Death at least came happily," said the sentimental Sub-Prefect, and Saturnin pursed his lips grimly.

"Remember Heine's observation about the pain or lack of pain in case of suicide: 'There are no official returns.' However, they look peaceful enough certainly, and perhaps after all . . ."

The Commissaire checked himself and looked down at the bed. Both faces were certainly serene, and that of the woman with her cheeks delicately flushed, appeared extremely pretty. She was in any case a dainty and attractive little thing, with loosened brown hair falling on white shoulders exposed above be-ribboned lace on a pink chiffon nightdress. Her eyes were closed, the position of her body easy and relaxed. Beside her, the man's face, for all its tranquillity, looked grim. It was naturally a face of grim gaiety and probably defiant recklessness. A strong face, in many ways; naturally swarthy, and with a great hooked nose above a clean-shaven, unscrupulous jaw. Dark hair, rather long and untidy, fell upon a broad forehead. The figure was short and there was a slight general resemblance to the Emperor Napoleon. The man's arms, clad in striped silk pyjamas, were outside the coverlet, and a small, leathern-bound book was beneath his hands. The light from a shaded lamp on a bed-side table illuminated the name of Shakespeare gilded, on the leather cover.

"Shakespeare," said the Sub-Prefect. "'Amlet.—'To be, or not to be?' zat is ze question, *hein?* "

But it was not the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, but of a woman, the serpent of old Nile, another who loved and lost and passed on, after the high Roman fashion. Saturnin examined the little, pocket-size volume which was open at the scene of 'immortal longings.' Again he handled things gingerly with his gloved hand, and another cellophane envelope was used to enclose the book. Now Saturnin moved more rapidly, and, though he was very thorough, he was astonishingly quick in his examination. He glanced at the hands of the dead man, looking narrowly at the finger-nails. He looked at the reading-lamp beside the bed, and then crossed to the stove, scrutinising the open top and the sanded groove where the heavy lid should have been. He picked up this heavy metal lid, some twenty centimetres in circumference. He looked at the nickel instrument used to unscrew, lift out, and screw up the lid.

Next he went to the windows and examined the fittings closely, then the supper-table.

"The windows close only too well," sighed the Sub-Prefect. "La, la, la! Figure to yourself suicide after such a supper, too! A bouillon; chicken salad with endives; a flan of quetsch with cream. Chambertin for Monsieur; still champagne for Madame. A good coffee; cigars and cigarettes. If life is not good after that, it's a bad look-out, eh?"

Saturnin smelled the wine-glasses and the decanters, tasted with the tip of his tongue, shook out sugar from a sugar-basin, looked into the earthenware coffee-pot on top of the stove. He stopped and picked up a screw of white paper.

"The drug was in the coffee, I suppose?"

"Yes. The doctor has taken away some coffee from the pot. In that white paper was the powdered drug—the doctor says."

A new interest was creeping into the Sub-Prefect's melancholy

eyes and now informed his tones. Saturnin's air of keen concentration, like a dog round a rabbit-hole, was suggestive—and not of an ordinary suicide verdict. Felix Norman was also very alert and followed every movement of his chief.

Over the back of a light chair hung a man's coat and waistcoat. In a top waistcoat pocket a green fountain-pen showed, held in position by a gold clip. Trousers, shirt and underclothing were thrown carelessly on to the couch amid the elaborately-dressed dolls. There was a small suit-case emptied except for hairbrushes and shaving tackle.

The Commissaire went rapidly through the contents of the pockets. He found a bunch of keys, counted them, paid particular attention to one of them, and then placed the bunch carefully in his pocket. He found a silver case holding visiting cards, with the engraved name, "Stephane Prad," but no address. A cigar-case of soft leather held three expensive cigars. There was a clean and folded handkerchief, a membership card for a Paris gambling-club; a rather formidable Swedish knife in a wooden sheaf; some snap-shots of a magnificent horse, in an envelope together with a four months-old *carte d'identité*.

Saturnin took the fountain-pen and crossed to the little writing desk. On top of this desk a cabinet photograph showed Clemence Bouquet, airily attired, with wings on her white shoulders, bow and arrows in her hand.

Seating himself gingerly in a light chair of white wood and basket-work, the Commissaire opened the pink blotter. Inside was some pink-scented notepaper upon a sheet of which Saturnin wrote a few words with the fountain-pen. He picked up one of the absurd quills, dipped it in a glass ink-pot before him and again wrote a few words. Finally he dropped the quill into a glass dish containing shot, pressed his written words against blotting-paper and put the sheet of note-paper in his pocket. He rose, screwing the cap again on the fountain-pen, but leaving it on the writing-table.

Saturnin's eyes met those of Felix Norman. The young officer's gaze was keen, and a little reproachful, but he knew better than to ask questions at the moment.

"There's a telephone in the hall, my boy," said the Commissaire.

"Get on to Headquarters—to Edmond Baschet. I want some of the technical laboratory staff here, with every gadget they possess."

"La, la, la! It is not then a question of 'To be or not to be?' You have observed something, my friend? You suspect murder?"

The Sub-Prefect's eyes were no longer melancholy, but shone with a keen, hard light.

Saturnin shrugged.

"There are points . . . We shall see, *mon vieux*. Meanwhile, I want a word with Helene, the maid."

.

Downstairs Saturnin interviewed Helene Reusy in her own spot-

less kitchen whilst a very fat guilty-looking cat peered out occasionally from beneath the range. Helene was a short, solidly square woman of some forty years of age. A hard-working peasant type whose face was naturally impassive; nevertheless her eyes were red from weeping.

"Well, Helene Reusy," said Saturnin, gently. "A bad affair, *hein*? To take one's life, and when one is young, too . . .!"

"Indeed, yes, monsieur."

Helene's stolid face quivered and she bit her lip. She had risen to her feet when Saturnin came into the room. He now motioned her towards a chair and sat himself.

"You don't mind if I smoke a cigarette? Thank you. There are no other servants beside yourself, Helene?"

"No, monsieur. I am the *bonne à tout faire*. I prefer that, and poor Madame preferred it too. There is not much work, anyway. Madame so often took her meals out—in Paris."

"Yes, evidently. Madame enjoyed life. Very wise. And you have been long with her?"

"Four years, monsieur. We got on well together, if I may put it that way."

Saturnin nodded gravely.

"Now, Helene. I want you to consider my next question very carefully. In your opinion was Madame unhappy? Was she the type to end her own life?"

Helene stared.

"There is a doubt . . .? *Ah, Mon Dieu!*"

"I do not say there is a doubt. I ask only a direct question."

"Yes, monsieur . . ."

Helene Reusy had put on a black dress which smelt rather strongly of camphor. She rubbed the palms of her red hands over the dark skirt at her knees.

"It is like this, monsieur . . . I have been asking myself that question. Was she unhappy—no. I think not. She seemed very happy in the last two months, when Monsieur Dupont gave her his protection. But then it seems Monsieur Dupont—I should say Monsieur Prad—wished to end his life. Perhaps he influenced Madame. He was of a type to influence others, I think. And poor Madame was easily led . . ."

"Yes, that is clear. Some natures are much influenced by other, stronger natures. But not usually, to the point of self-destruction. Even in these unhappy times, life is good, eh? To a young, gay, pretty woman life is something to preserve—to enjoy."

"Yes, monsieur . . ." The *bonne* nodded and rubbed her knees as though this action clarified her thoughts.

"Certainly life is good, whatever ups and downs come to most of us. But poor Madame was very emotional, very temperamental. You know she had been an artiste, monsieur. She was *commère* for two years in the revues produced at the Eden Music Hall. The poor thing! She threw herself into the river, monsieur. That was

seven years ago. She told me about it once. She had no stage work, and her friend had deserted her . . . So once, you see, she had the courage and the will . . . Only was she saved by chance."

"Yes . . ."

Saturnin blew out a cloud of smoke reflectively.

"Yes—without work or money or friends. But that is different from today, when she has the villa, and no doubt her position is quite altered. She was not hysterical, I suppose?"

"Hysterical? You mean fits? I never saw her like that. She was angry sometimes, like a tempest. Then, in a quarter of an hour, all was over. She would come to me smiling, and offer me a hat or perhaps some lingerie."

Saturnin grunted. He lit a fresh cigarette and looked at the round, red face of the servant.

"All right, Helene. Let us come now to the night of the tragedy. Tell me, in your own words, what happened, so far as you know."

The woman did not hesitate. Volubly, and with much unnecessary detail, she told how she was given Sunday evening as a holiday and went to Paris to see her parents, staying the night with them. This was quite usual, and had become almost a habit in these two summer months. Monsieur Dupont, or Prad, came either on the Saturday or the Sunday evening. Whichever day it might be, Helene was given a hundred francs and told she could go to her parents. On the fatal Sunday evening Helene prepared a supper, mostly cold, except for bouillon and coffee, which she left on the stove. Although it was still September the stove was lighted in the bedroom alcove. Madame felt the cold a good deal, and Monsieur, it seemed, had lived in the tropics, and his blood was thin. So Helene left her supper on a table up in the boudoir, where the stove was lit. Madame had gone into St. Remi to meet Monsieur, who came always by train. With her work done, Helene, dressed for town, bolted the back door and leaving the front door key under the mat in the porch, in accordance with custom, walked into St. Remi. As she approached the railway station she saw, across the street, Monsieur and Madame, who were leaving, Monsieur carrying a little suitcase, and Madame holding his arm. Madame waved gaily to Helene; and Monsieur, who had exquisite manners, raised his hat. Helene smiled and waved back to Madame and went into the station where the train for Paris was almost due. Helene never saw either Monsieur or Madame again alive.

"But, the next morning . . ."

"A little moment," Saturnin checked her. "You prepared the coffee, as well as the soup, Helene? Since the stove was lit in the bedroom you put them on the stove so that they would remain warm. You expected Monsieur and Madame to arrive shortly after you left them, *n'est-ce-pas*?"

"That is so. Monsieur had telephoned his time of arrival. His train came in a few minutes before mine would arrive for Paris. So within ten minutes of my leaving the house, they would enter

it, all ready for the meal. The soup and coffee would be hot and quite all right, monsieur."

"Yes,—another point, Helene, you decanted the wines, eh?"

"Yes. I got two bottles from the cellar. Chambertin, for Monsieur. I placed his decanter near the stove so that the wine should be *chambré*. As for Madame's little wine it could take care of itself, *hein*?"

"Evidently. Did Madame prefer a still champagne to superior wines?"

"She did. Sometimes—fairly frequently—she would drink the sparkling wine. But she had a great liking for still champagne."

The servant went on with her story, relating how she had spent the night with her parents who lived on the exterior boulevards at the other side of Paris. It was because of the long journey, perhaps, that she was given the whole night off, though possibly Monsieur and Madame liked to be alone.

Helene described how she had returned to the villa and noticed at once that the shutters were still closed at the bedroom windows. This surprised her a little since it was eleven in the morning, and Monsieur was usually stirring. He would rise, make coffee, and take it up to Madame. But Helene found the front door closed and the back doors were bolted. Now, a little alarmed, she returned to the front, and found beneath the mat in the porch the front-door key. She began to wonder if Monsieur and Madame had risen early and gone out, but the theory would scarcely explain the *persiennes* closed and the windows . . . Now, becoming quite alarmed, Helene hastened upstairs and at once saw the fatal notice on the bedroom door.

"You comprehend English, Helene?"

"Yes, monsieur. I was for a few years cook to an English family at Auteuil."

"So you pushed back the door and entered the room?"

"Yes, monsieur. But, first, I went into the bathroom and moistened a towel. Holding it to my face, I ran quickly through the room and managed to get open a pair of windows. Ah, *mon Dieu*! I had to run out again quickly, monsieur. And I sat on the stairs, feeling sick at my stomach. It was a bad quarter of an hour I passed, monsieur!"

"Evidently. You acted wisely, and with courage. When you pushed back the door did you feel any resistance?"

"Resistance, monsieur?"

"Yes. As though something held the door?"

"Ah, yes. There were newspapers, were there not?"

"And you felt them against the bottom of the door?"

"Yes, yes. I think so. I was of course, in a state. But in quite a state, monsieur!"

"Surely. You saw these two figures on the bed as you dashed across the room?"

"I did, monsieur. Heaven forgive them!"

"Then the lights were on, Helene? At least the reading lamp by the bedside, eh? For not much light would come through those closed *persiennes*."

"That is so. The electric reading-lamp was on. I saw Monsieur's face, and the light on Madame's hair, I felt—in a state. I went down to my kitchen and had some brandy. I needed it! Then I telephoned to the police. Monsieur and Madame dead. I was sure of that. I wondered whether I had better go and look—but I am not a nurse. I wondered. Perhaps I ought to touch nothing, interfere with nothing? Then the police came. They were not five or six minutes in arriving. A doctor, too. But of course he was too late!"

Tears came into Helene's eyes. She fumbled for a handkerchief and blew her nose loudly.

"Pardon, monsieur. Madame and I . . . we got on well together. One is upset, *n'est-ce-pas*? One loses the north a little."

"Perfectly. You are a good girl, Helene. Just another question or two . . . Madame did not lock her bedroom door, habitually?"

"No, I think not. She was not nervous in that way . . . of burglars. When Monsieur was in the house the door would not be locked."

"And you left the front door key under the porch,—was that customary?"

"It was quite usual, monsieur. If it suited convenience I would leave it for Madame. She would leave it for me."

"So you were not startled when you found the key, this morning, under the mat inside the porch?"

"No. Uneasy, but not startled. And it was the closed shutters and windows made me uneasy, not merely the key. You see, had Monsieur and Madame decided not to rise early then the key might have been left out for me, so that I could enter and make coffee. But when I entered and heard no sound, I was afraid. I hoped to hear Madame call to me. I hoped, or half hoped to find a natural explanation of the closed shutters and the silence; there had been much wind, and the shutters had been closed; Monsieur and Madame had headaches, or just felt lazy . . . You see? One continues to find reasons for hope so long as one can, eh?"

"Yes. Perfectly. Now, those newspapers, made up into tight rolls and pushed into the crack at the bottom of the door,—you saw them, of course?"

"Yes. I noticed them. *Le Journal* and *Paris Soir*. We take them in. Madame liked to read the *feuilltons*. I have a stack of them, here in my kitchen. They were taken from here, Monsieur."

"Good. And this pin? It is of a kind commonly used by Madame?"

Saturnin removed the black-headed pin from his coat-lapel, and handed it to Helene. She examined it gravely, but in a moment declared that her late mistress had possessed a packet of such pins.

"Thank you, Helene. You have been intelligent and helpful."

Saturnin rose to his feet and the woman did the same.

"I take it that Madame was not worried about money? So far as you know? The tradesmen were paid? Monsieur was generous, eh?"

"Our bills were paid. I think, too, that Monsieur was very generous. He was that type, you comprehend? I don't think poor Madame was rolling in money. But she was not worried. She would have told me, had she been really worried. She could not conceal such things. The poor creature! She wore her heart on her sleeve."

"But she was wearing it only for Monsieur Prad, *n'est-ce-pas*? There was no other lover, somewhere in the background? Someone recently discarded perhaps? Making trouble—harbouring a grievance?"

"No, monsieur," Helene Reusy was emphatic. "That sort of thing was not in poor Madame's character. She was not an angel—evidently. But she was chic in her ways. Never would she have two gentlemen friends at once. She played no dirty tricks, and had no enemies, I am sure. Poor dear! If anything, she was too frank and outspoken. Her own worst enemy, monsieur."

Saturnin heard the sound of an automobile arriving and recognized the engine of a police car. The technical staff had come, and the Commissaire went out for a word with Edmond Baschet.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CLUES

"Against the superiority of another there is no remedy but love."
GOETHE.

SATURNIN had five minutes serious talk with Edmond Baschet, the clever, owl-like young man from Marseilles who ran the police technical laboratory. They were still talking in the road outside the villa when Felix Norman appeared round a bend driving his red sports car.

"That's understood then, Edmond," said Saturnin, and receiving an affirmative answer he went to meet Felix.

"Well, milord? Flushed with triumph, eh?"

The Commissaire grinned maliciously at Felix's reddening face.

"You spent so long flirting in the kitchen I thought I'd have a look round," said Felix. "There's a lane runs at the back of this villa. The lane connects between St. Remi and Fourche. There has been a fair amount of rain, and . . ."

"And in this lane, at the back of the villa, you have found traces of a car?"

"Yes."

Felix stared.

"You haven't seen them? You haven't been round there, have you?"

Felix Norman's expressive pink face had fallen considerably. It cleared when Saturnin answered.

"No, my boy. Tell me what you've found."

"Well, you are right about the car. An automobile spent an hour or more in the deserted lane at the back of this villa last night. There is a pool of oil; and I picked up no less than five cigarette-ends. The marks of the tyres are plain. The back tyres, anyway. Both of them are Englebert, that is Belgian make. The off-side tyre has been repaired, rather clumsily. I made a sketch of it—the pattern it made. A gendarme is now making plaster casts of both tyre-tracks."

"Good! And the make of the car? I can see you know that too."

"It's a Swedish Volvo. Number R.F.X. 7432. The distance separating the tracks is 1.3 metres. I think I got some more. A man who owns a Swedish Volvo has been visiting St. Remi occasionally in the last two months. Rather a mysterious individual. A little furtive. The hotel people saw him once or twice in his car, but he did not garage it with them: he garaged it at the other end of the town. I've been to the garage and found an intelligent mechanic. It was he who repaired the off-side tyre; he recognized my sketch, and gave me a description of the car's owner. Short, plump, fair-haired, calling himself Philipp. The hotel guest with seemingly no particular business or purpose, also called himself Philipp. He also is described as short, corpulent, and fair-haired. He departed suddenly, last night, at close upon midnight."

"Ah. Good boy!"

Saturnin clapped Felix on the back and pushed him towards the car. "I think I'd better cover the same ground as you covered. The spot in the lane where the Swedish Volvo waited; then the garage and intelligent mechanic, and finally the hotel."

The two men climbed into the low, rakish car. Felix produced a small tin box and opened it carefully to show some cigarette-ends.

"I thought I'd better pick them up. They are marked Turmac Orange. Smoked in a holder. I don't know much about cigarettes but these are fairly expensive and therefore rather distinctive, eh?"

"Fairly," Saturnin shrugged. "Not very. One may buy them in most cafés, though they're imported. From Belgium. Made by the Turkish-Macedonia Tobacco Company. By the way, handle them gingerly. Since they were smoked in a holder there may possibly be finger-prints."

The sports car shot away towards St. Remi, turned right into a lane, and came back towards the villa.

"You had a look at the turning, I suppose, for possible traces of the front tyres?" said Saturnin.

"I did. But the lane widens out too much for a sharp turn, and, in any case, the Swedish Volvo probably went round by way of Fourche. A short distance, and easier than backing and turning. The local men are on the hunt for front tyre marks, and a general

warning has been issued, to look out for the Swedish Volvo, R.F.X. 7432."

"Good."

It was growing dusk when they came to the spot where two gendarmes were busy making plaster casts of the Englebert tyre tracks. Just over a low, clipped hedge a clear view of the villa, its back entrance and windows, its front garden path and gates, could readily be obtained. Saturnin spent very little time over the tracks in the road, he seemed more interested in the view obtainable from just this spot in the lane.

After a swift look around and a word of encouragement to the gendarmes, the red car was backed and turned towards St. Remi.

Inquiries at the garage proved less satisfactory than they might have been. The "mechanic" who had serviced Philipp's car was actually one of two proprietors who ran the business. The man was quite an intelligent witness but his interest was in machines rather than in human beings. He knew all about the Swedish Volvo, and described it in detail, giving its number. He was sound enough on the repaired tyre, the history of this and the certainty of the pattern it would leave in soft mud—in fact, it had left a similar pattern, he remembered, in the garage courtyard. But when it came to describing the mysterious Monsieur Philipp information was scanty. The garage proprietor was vague about such matters as height, build, voice, gestures and so on. Short, rather fat with fairish hair and complexion was about as much as the police-officers could gain at the garage.

At the Hotel du Centre things were not much better. Monsieur Philipp had spent little of his time in the hotel. He took his meals somewhere outside, except for his morning coffee, which was taken up to his bedroom. The *garçon d'étage*, who took up the coffee, said Monsieur Philipp always appeared to be asleep when the coffee and rolls were deposited on a table by his head. He would himself draw back the curtains. There was little or no conversation held between the hotel staff and this guest who had not attracted any notice until his abrupt departure last night, so very late. Even then he had said something about a friend in Paris taken ill, and the explanation was accepted. The hall-porter, who often acted as reception-clerk, was not very interested in Monsieur Philipp. He was taciturn, colourless, and out of the hotel more than he was in it. Hotel manager and staff had really only begun to discuss this Monsieur Philipp when the news of the tragedy at the villa came to St. Remi: and even then no one really imagined a connection between the touch of mystery surrounding Monsieur Philipp's departure and the stark tragedy of the lover's suicide pact.

Saturnin patiently questioned, checked evidence, controlled comment and impressions. A short, rather fat man, with scanty fair hair was the sole picture unfolded after much talk. The clothes worn by Monsieur Philipp were also, it seemed, quite unremarkable. Did their guest smoke cigarettes in a holder? A floor-waiter

said "no"; the manager said "yes"; the hall porter had never seen Monsieur Philipp smoking. Had he received letters or visitors? The porter said "no." A waiter thought he had seen Monsieur Philipp receive in the lounge a lady visitor. But the waiter's description of this visitor was useless; his testimony most doubtful.

Saturnin gnawed at his moustache, whilst Felix suggested that Philipp had done all he could to avoid notice.

"I suppose," said Saturnin. "The man gave up his key before taking his departure, last night?"

This was so. The hall-porter had taken the key. Also he had made out a bill for Monsieur Philipp, who had paid a surplus of twelve per cent. *pourboire* for the staff. The signature of Monsieur Philipp was examined in the hotel guest-book. He had come to the Hotel du Centre, Saint Remi, three times in the last two months, each time at a week-end, and staying only two days. His signatures in the book showed a neat, precise handwriting. On each occasion the guest had signed with the hotel pen offered him, and not with any fountain-pen of his own. The address given was simply "Paris."

Saturnin sighed, and asked to see the room Philipp had recently occupied. He learned that it had been very thoroughly swept and garnished, and he sighed again.

Accompanied by the manager—thin, jaded and anxious—Saturnin and Felix went up to the second floor in an ancient lift. The hotel was as quiet as a tomb, and the manager complained of business.

"And, if we do get a guest," he said, with bitter irony, "then the police want him, too."

A pleasant odour of cooking crept up with them as far as the first floor, but no sound of human voice or movement came from these corridors.

"Number 48," said the manager. "One of our best rooms. Pardon, messieurs."

He opened a door with a pass-key and stood back to let the police-officers enter. It was dark, and lights were switched on. A quite ordinary, mediocre hotel bedroom was revealed. It looked very naked under the lights, with the dressing table stripped, the clothes-pegs bare, the bed prim and undisturbed. Nevertheless Saturnin made a thorough search before signifying that he had seen enough.

As the hotel-manager re-locked the room, Saturnin looking about him saw, across the landing, a door upon which was no number.

"A bathroom?" asked the Commissaire.

"Yes, a bathroom, monsieur," agreed the manager. "We have," he added, with quiet pride, "a bathroom on both the first and second floors."

Saturnin opened the door of a fair-sized room. There was a porcelain bath, a basin with running water, a table, and a toilet beyond. On the table, which was covered with a brown linen

cloth, stood an adjustable mirror, old-fashioned, with hinged, mahogany frame. There was also a hair brush and broken comb and a towel.

The Commissaire picked up the brush and comb and examined them narrowly beneath the electric lights: he even used a pocket-lens before laying aside the brush. He turned to the smooth towel which seemed to have been used, a little wantonly, by one person only.

The hotel-manager made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"That towel should have been taken away and replaced by a clean one. And look how it has been used, messieurs. Abused rather!"

Impatiently he threw the soiled towel into a corner.

"One must run a hotel to discover how people, supposedly decent, will treat linen and furniture not their own!"

Saturnin murmured sympathetically.

"It would be Monsieur Philipp who used the towel and this room, so conveniently adjacent to his own, *n' est-ce-pas?*"

"Without doubt, monsieur. There has been no other guest on the whole second floor, either yesterday or the day before, in fact, for a week past."

"Ah."

Saturnin picked up the hairbrush again.

"Then actually your departed guest has reddish tinged, not fair, brown hair?"

"That is so. In effect. There was a reddish tinge, now I think of it."

The manager looked, with a fatigued air, at the brush Saturnin showed him.

"Yes, one remembers now, it was distinctly reddish."

"Good!"

Satisfied, Saturnin replaced the brush on the table, and, in doing so, he made another discovery. On a glass ledge placed over the wash-basin was a large china ash-tray enriched by the name of a firm which manufactures a famous aperitif. In this ash-tray lay a cigarette holder containing a burnt-out cigarette-end. Saturnin picked up his find very gingerly. The cigarette was a Turmac Orange. The holder, about ten centimetres in length, was of bone and ended in a silver cup gripping the cigarette.

"So Monsieur Philipp certainly did smoke," observed Saturnin. "That is a point settled, anyway."

"I knew very well he did," asserted the manager. "That waiter is a fool. I remember now: I saw Monsieur Philipp take such a cigarette as that out of a red and yellow box of twenty—or twenty-five cigarettes, which he carried in his pocket. That waiter has no eyes in his head. He observes nothing!"

"Few do, monsieur. You'd be surprised."

Saturnin was again using a pocket-lens as he inspected the cigarette-holder with the greatest care. Felix looked over his superior

officer's shoulders, until finally the Commissaire handed him the article.

"See what your young eyes can discern," he said. "Let's go downstairs. I should like to use a telephone, monsieur. Somewhere in privacy."

A few moments later, in the manager's private office, the Commissaire was calling headquarters. Felix sat nearby, turning over in his fingers the cigarette-holder of bone and silver.

Saturnin got his number, asked for Brigadier Georges Alder, and then as he waited smiled at Felix.

"Prepare, milord, to be astounded yet again at my powers. I warn you that. . . 'Allo. Listen, Georges. I badly want a man who has been here in St. Remi and left last night, suddenly, at midnight. He left in a Swedish Volvo. Number R.F.X. 7432. Dark blue. Back tyres, both Englebert; and the off-side tyre repaired, rather clumsily. Yes, yes. Car number plate may be false; the car may have been knocked off. Just so. Though he came three times to St. Remi in the same car. The man himself is middle-aged, plump, short, with reddish thin hair. Uses a lot of brilliantine. Although he called himself Gaston Philipp this is probably an alias, and his initials seem to be E. C. He has large clammy hands. Dresses inconspicuously. Smokes rather heavily—a cigarette called Turmac, the Orange brand. His upper teeth are false. A denture—yes. Probably he has been a medical student in his youth. You might try some of the old hands with the description, Georges. Plump—yes. Well, maybe. Not very fat, seemingly. Witnesses not too good here, Georges. Initials E. C.—What . . . ?"

A note of keener interest came into Saturnin's voice.

"Emile Chartrettes. Yes. Sounds pretty certain, Georges. Is he a crook? A detective? *Sacrebleu!* Office in the Boulevard Haussmann. I see. Good for you, Georges. I suppose his office isn't open at night? No. You don't happen to know his private address. I see. All right. Thanks very much, *mon vieux.*"

Saturnin hung up and grinned at Felix.

"Astonished, I trust?" he suggested. "Once more my amazing perceptions have . . ."

"I saw the initials scratched or carved on the cigarette-holder," said Felix, a little coldly.

"The rest is pretty easy. I don't get that medical student stuff though, or the false upper teeth."

"Aha! Yet you have that cigarette-holder in your hands. What is it made of?"

"Well it looks like bone. Roughish looking bone."

"It is a bone. A human bone, taken from the wrist and called the ulna. Quite a trick of medical students. One must get something out of dissection."

"*Mon Dieu!* Is it possible?"

Felix looked with great distaste at the tube in his hands.

"Perfectly clean, my boy. Well boiled, you may be sure. As

for the artificial top teeth. If you look closely, or with a lens you'll notice that teeth have bitten into the bone at the bottom, but not at the top. A man fears to press too hard with a denture."

"Ah, good! And Alder recognised the description. Fellow named Emile Chartrettes, eh? We ought to get him. Who, or what is he?"

"He is in our line of business, my boy. But privately. Runs an inquiry agency. Probably more than half a crook."

"With an office in the Boulevard Haussmann. Shall we go there?"

"Not to-night. There would be no one there. Anyway, the Mobile Brigade marches on its stomach. Let's go and eat. My nose tells me that food is pretty adequate here, whatever may be said for the rooms."

CHAPTER EIGHT : DETECTED DETECTIVE

"Nothing produces more singularity of manners and inconstancy of life than the conflict of opposite vices in the same mind."

—DR. JOHNSON.

At a few minutes after ten on the following morning, Saturnin Dax, having ascended six floors in an elevator and walked, of necessity, up a seventh floor, pushed open the door of an office in the Boulevard Haussmann. Before him, at a desk, a girl was carefully painting her finger nails with a tiny brush and a bottle of almost colourless liquid. The stinging scent of collodion was pervasive. Behind her was an inner office with its door marked "Private : Direction." The girl looked up and smiled at the Commissaire. Her skirts were very short, her sweater very tight, her mouth very red. The smile was inviting, as she abandoned her beauty-parlour work and shook one hand in the air, apparently to dry the nails.

"Good morning, monsieur."

"Good morning, mademoiselle. Is Monsieur Chartrettes in?"

"Have you an appointment?"

The girl rose, with another seductive smile, and put her bottle and brush away in a drawer.

"Tell him Commissaire Dax wishes to see him."

The smile left the girl's lips. The languor and the sex-appeal were absent as she shot a quick, sly glance over the caller.

"Will you sit down?"

The girl went to the door of the inner office. She entered without knocking. Saturnin did not sit down; he was listening carefully, his eyes on the door. He heard nothing, not even voices. Silently, he crossed to the girl's desk and examined a bottle of ink, dipping a clean-nibbed fountain-pen into the dark fluid. After

about a minute the girl came out again. She was carrying a stenographer's notebook. She looked at Saturnin with great brightness, saying sweetly.

"Monsieur Chartrettes won't keep you five minutes."

"How right you are," said Saturnin.

He crossed the room and entered the inner office. A short, plump man with thin, reddish hair brushed carefully over his round head, sat at a desk staring with concentrated thought in front of him. The man's hair shone with brilliantine. Close to his hands was an open box of cigarettes, the box vividly coloured in orange and lighter yellow. The name Turmac was lettered on the box.

"Ah! Good morning. Commissaire Dax. I don't think I ever had the pleasure of meeting you before."

Throwing off his abstraction, Emile Chartrettes had risen with a great air of bonhomie. He offered a large, white, moist hand. He moved a chair, quite unnecessarily, as he invited his guest to be seated. Saturnin looked quickly around him at the conventionally furnished office with its filing-cabinet, telephone, type-writer set on a table in the window, and an old fashioned stove. Everything from the carpet to the type-writer looked shabby, as though bought second-hand. Emile Chartrettes matched. He had a little, hooked nose. His indecisive chin was badly shaven. His eyes were peculiarly light and completely belied the smile on his lips. There was something of the ferret about the man, despite his plumpness; something within him appeared to sharpen his nose, his chin and the quick, uneasy glances from his pale eyes.

"Sit down, Commissaire. It's an honour for a poor, private dick to meet one of the heads! The man who took Weiss and Ramon Ortiz! Honestly, and without phrases, I'd give an ear, two ears, to have handled those cases as you did. You'll smoke?"

"Thank you."

Saturnin seated himself with a grunt. He selected a cigarette slowly and looked at it before accepting a light.

"Quite good cigarettes," said Saturnin, at length. "Imported from Belgium, eh?"

"Yes. Or smuggled."

Chartrettes laughed. There was no sign of laughter in the colourless eyes that swept keenly over his visitor.

"Good cigarettes," repeated Saturnin. "I found the butts of five of them in a lane at the back of a villa outside St. Remi. That was yesterday. The cigarettes had been smoked the previous evening, rather late, after the rain."

"Yes? I don't quite . . . ?"

"These Turmac cigarettes had been smoked in a holder. By a man seated in a Swedish Volvo. In fact your Swedish Volvo. The one you garaged a quarter of an hour ago in the Rue Taitbout."

"I don't understand."

Chartrettes licked his lips.

"I have been in St. Remi, once or twice, why not?"

"Why not, indeed! "

"As for these Turmac cigarettes. Millions smoke them."

"In a holder? "

"Certainly. Many people use a holder."

Chartrettes took out a not over-clean linen handkerchief and made as though he would wipe his forehead; thinking better of it, he wiped his lips.

"Listen, Chartrettes," said Saturnin. "I found the holder, too. Your holder, made from a wrist-bone. You were once a medical student, weren't you? Your initials are on the holder, as you know. So are the marks of your teeth. I have witnesses who can answer for you and your car. At the Hotel du Centre and at the garage they will recognize you as Monsieur Gaston Philipp. At the local restaurant, the Chapon Fin, the waiter will certainly know you again."

Emile Chartrettes picked up a steel paper-knife and looked at it blankly.

"I use the name of Gaston Philipp sometimes. In our job one finds it useful, in fact necessary, sometimes to assume . . ."

"Wait." Saturnin cut across the other's slow speech. "I am not accusing you of any crime, am I? Why all this reluctance, Chartrettes? You were in St. Remi on Sunday. In the evening you spent an hour or more in the lane behind a certain villa. The traces are unmistakable, so let us not waste time. The fact that two people committed suicide in that villa; the fact that they had planned this, and were actually embarking on their plan whilst you were close by—these things need not cause you apprehension, eh? "

"No. No, certainly not. I read, of course, of Prad's suicide, and that of the woman, Clemence Bouquet."

Emile Chartrettes rose, went over to the stove, looked at it, and then returned to his desk.

"I happened to be in St. Remi on Sunday night, Commissaire. I had been down there two or three times lately. On business, you comprehend. I am not at liberty to betray the private affairs of my clients, but I can assure you, I have been mixed in nothing which need concern you. Honestly, and without phrases, I am for nothing in these suicides, Commissaire."

Saturnin nodded.

"Honestly, and without phrases, you were hired by Madam Prad, I suppose, to discover where her husband spent these little holidays and week-ends away from his wife? Isn't that it? "

"Yes. Yes, that is true."

"But why did you leave the Hotel du Centre, at St. Remi, so suddenly? "

"Suddenly . . .? "

"Isn't it a little peculiar, in a place like that, suddenly to demand one's bill at midnight? To change one's plans abruptly? Cancel a room; forfeit a night's board, and depart? Why the hurry? "

The hotel people were surprised. The garage proprietor, too. Even I am surprised, and I am not easily surprised, *voyons!* "

Chartrettes lips twisted in what might have been a smile.

"Plainly it is no use trying to deceive you, Commissaire. I might have known it. I shall be perfectly frank. On Sunday I should, in the ordinary way, have gone to bed round about midnight, as I usually do. But, figure to yourself, a girl telephoned me. What would you? Man proposes, woman depose, *hein?* She phoned from the Bal Tabarin. She was there alone. She had been disappointed in a friend who had not turned up. Would I come along, console her, and have supper with her? The floor-show was so good, and just about to begin. I could arrive in some forty minutes. Well, I confess I was bored by the life of St. Remi. I am not a man of the country-side. I am a Parisian, with the love of . . ."

"The name of the girl, please?"

"I don't know it."

Chartrettes shrugged his plump shoulders.

"It happens like that . . . Marie, something or other, I forget what. Even her telephone number I forget. She is blonde, slim, with brown eyes . . . Almost every night she goes to the Bal Tabarin. I can, of course, discover exactly . . ."

"Of course! Where did she phone you?"

"Where? You mean . . .?"

"At the Hotel du Centre?"

"Ah! You mean how did she know where to find me on that Sunday night. Well, you see, I had seen her in the Bal Tabarin four or five nights previously. I must have told her I was going to St. Remi for the week-end."

"Mentioning the hotel you would stay at, and the false name you would assume?"

"With her I have used always the name of Philipp."

Saturnin rose in a quick movement and stood threateningly over the other.

"Emile Chartrettes, what did you see at St. Remi on Sunday evening?"

"I don't understand."

"What, or who did you see? What sent you suddenly off at midnight?" What tells you now that those suicides were not genuine suicides, but treacherous murders? What are you now concealing from me? Reflect. I assure you that you had now better think of yourself—your own position."

"I am for nothing in this affair."

The plump, short man had sweat on his forehead as he rose and looked up at his questioner. Chartrettes' large white fingers were trembling.

"What are you concealing, Chartrettes? Hoping to get black-mail? Tell me. Tell me!"

"I saw Madame Prad there . . ."

"Where ? "

"Close to the villa."

"What time ? "

"Between seven and eight in the evening. Then again, I saw her in the town. Near a cinema. That was about ten at night, or a little later. The light fell straight on her face, and I saw her expression. There was murder written there. Sheer murder! She looked the same, when I first revealed to her the truth about her husband. A dangerous woman, that! "

Saturnin grunted. For a moment he looked hard at the other whilst he thumbed his moustache to left and right. Then, without another word, the Commissaire walked out of the office.

CHAPTER NINE: THE WIDOW

"Women have a subtler language than ours: the veil pertains to them morally as bodily and they see clearer through it."

—MEREDITH.

IN the great vestibule of the Hotel Monseigneur the Commissaire Dax paced about, a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, his eyes abstracted. Sometimes he hummed a fragment of the "Unfinished Symphony," whilst a cosmopolitan, "moneyed" clientele stared at his appearance. Whatever Saturnin might spend on his clothes he was invariably eyed somewhat askance by such people as patronise, or work in the hotels de luxe.

From a distance came sounds of musical instruments as an orchestra arrived to play during luncheon. In the hall, between telephone booths and lift-shafts were the show-cases of business houses of the Rue de la Paix and the Place Vendome. Jewellery, fans, bags, dresses, lingerie, and perfume; a watch which needed no winding; shoes made from the skins of lizards, snakes and alligators; old books converted into boxes for cigars or sweets; in short, ingenious devices for the painless extraction of money from millionaires.

A page-boy, very short but white-gloved and important, came to Saturnin.

"Madame Prad has now entered, monsieur, and will receive you. If you will step this way."

Saturnin stepped. Following his guide, he was taken in a lift to the first floor and along wide, softly carpeted corridors to a door numbered "fourteen." The boy knocked; a woman's musical voice said, in English, "Come!" And the Commissaire was, the next moment, facing Estelle Prad.

The woman was, he considered every bit as beautiful as her photograph suggested. Evidently she had just entered, for she wore

a coat of Persian lamb with a hat to match. Her frock beneath the coat, though dark, was not black, but a pair of new black gloves were in her hands. Her hair was brown and seemed to match her eyes, and Saturnin reflected that, even in their infidelity, some men are true to a type, for Estelle Prad was a taller, more stately version of little Clemence Bouquet. The dead woman had been petite, fluffy, and probably of the "clinging" variety. Estelle Prad was neither small nor fluffy; and Saturnin could not imagine her wishing to cling, for she looked decidedly assured and self-sufficing. Nevertheless Stephane Prad's mistress and his widow possessed several common physical traits.

"Won't you sit down? I hope you speak English—er—Commissaire Dax? I am an American, you know. I can make myself understood in French, but French people usually wince."

Saturnin smiled and bowed. He waited while she slipped out of her fur coat and seated herself.

"My English may prove adequate," he suggested. As he sat down he noted that the room was one of quite a large suite. A partly open door gave a glimpse of a further sitting-room. The room they were in was also a sitting-room, and, to the dehumanised hotel furniture had been added some personal belongings, a piano and a shelf of books, whilst some massed blue and pink hydrangeas and a great bowl of red carnations introduced colour and fragrance.

Despite the woman's claim to be an American, a claim undoubtedly true, Saturnin judged that Estelle Prad was not particularly typical of the New World; rather she looked as though she came from territory the late Allen Upward described as the "East End of Europe," Roumania perhaps, Hungary or Bulgaria. There was a touch of the Slav somewhere about her lips, her high cheek-bones, even in her accent, smooth and fluent as was her English speech.

She took off her hat with a gesture that suggested fatigue, and looked at him questioningly.

"Madame," said Saturnin. "You have recently received a tremendous shock and I would offer my profound sympathy. You are doubtless very tired, distressed, and . . . disoriented in your ideas. I will therefore take up as little of your time as possible."

"Thank you, Commissaire."

Her voice was soft. Nevertheless he thought he detected a wariness in her tones, a caution reflected in the quick glance of her brown eyes.

"I will be quite frank," said Saturnin. "I shall not fence; I shall lay no traps; I will just say that I know you were in St. Remi on Sunday evening, and I will ask you to be good enough to explain."

"Explain? I don't quite understand, Commissaire. By Sunday evening, you mean, of course, the day before yesterday?"

"Yes, madame. The day . . . the night of the tragedy."

Her face did not alter, but her hands were trembling slightly.

She picked up the black gloves from a table and played with them nervously.

"Does my presence in St. Remi require an explanation?"

"Evidently I imagine so, madame, since I ask for one."

Saturnin shrugged.

"I may be wrong, of course, in my conjectures. But I would like to hear what you have to tell me, please?"

"Well, I was certainly in St. Remi. I—I usually go out, in my car on a Sunday, and—well, I just appeared to find myself in St. Remi."

"Come, come! Madame. Please! You will scarcely deny you went there because you knew your husband was there. Because a private detective, named Emile Chartrettes, had informed you of the liaison your husband had formed."

"Yes, that is so."

The woman's face flushed scarlet. She had a thin, straight nose, and her nostrils quivered as though she were fighting against an impulse to sneeze.

"So that little rat sold me. He took my money and betrayed me!"

"No. I found Chartrettes. This morning I threatened him and, under threats, he gave me certain information. Actually, it was I who suggested to him that you had hired him to watch your husband. It was obvious. That is his usual line of business. But if you employ such people, madame, you may be sure they will do and say whatever appears to them profitable."

"I suppose so . . ."

She looked at him directly.

"I don't quite know why you are questioning me, Commissaire. I did not wish the world to know that I was a deceived wife, and a jealous one. However . . ."

"I am discreet, madame. Believe me, your private affairs . . . your feelings, will be carefully considered by me."

"Thank you. Then I may as well admit I hired Chartrettes. It was not merely that Stephane was deceiving me. It was . . . well, you would say, probably, that it was feminine curiosity. I admit I just had to know, if I could. It is maddening to be told lies, lies, lies . . . when you know they are lies. It maddened me to be . . . to be 'played for a sucker,' as we say in the States."

"You wanted to confront your husband's prevarications with the truth? To say: 'I know where you have been. Just where, and with whom.' Is that it, madame?"

"I wanted to be in a position to do so, if I ever wished to do so."

"So you hired Chartrettes?"

"Yes. I hired the little rat. When I saw he was just running up expenses and trying to play me up, I told him he could stop working. Then he came across with the real stuff. The address of this woman . . . snapshots of them, walking in St. Remi."

"When did you pay off Chartrettes?"

"Three weeks ago. As soon as I verified his story."

"Three weeks ago! So, last Sunday, he was working on his own in St. Remi?"

"I know nothing about that, Commissaire. Perhaps he planned to sell evidence to poor Stephane . . . I don't know. You will know better than me what a rat like Chartrettes is likely to be up to. He saw me, I suppose, in St. Remi?"

"He did."

"Yes . . ."

The woman stared before her.

"I went there with the idea of facing the pair of them. I had been down there weeks before. I had seen the woman, at one of the villa windows. On Sunday, left alone, I suddenly felt angry. I drove down there . . . But, somehow, I could not do it."

"Ah!"

"I recognized I should put myself in an absurd and undignified position. But it was not only that . . ."

For the first time, a softer look came over the woman's handsome face.

"I began to reflect. I began to think of the happiness Stephane and I had once shared. I remembered a phrase of his; used regarding some other couple: 'After all, we cannot compel affection.' The implied philosophy probably suits men better than women, but there is much truth in it. So, in the end, I walked to the villa, but walked back without calling. I went into a café; then, later, I went to a cinema. Heaven knows what film was showing. I saw nothing of it. But I sat in the semi-darkness thinking over the past; Stephane and myself; his faults and mine. And, finally, I came away from St. Remi without seeing Stephane or the woman, without knowing the truth—which was, I suppose, that they died that very night."

There was silence for a moment or two. Estelle Prad seemed to be lost once more in her memories. Saturnin, watching her expression, softened his voice when he spoke again.

"Thank you, madame. That is a clear statement, and your feelings are readily comprehensible. There are just one or two questions I would ask you, and I shall be brief. Firstly, are you of the opinion that your husband was a man to take that fatal step? Were there reasons for such a step? Reasons known to you, that is?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Stephane was a strange man, Commissaire. We married a little late in life, both being in the thirties. I can't pretend to know him well enough to say what he would do in every given circumstance. I begin to wonder, in fact, if we ever really know any other person. We may think we do. We find ourselves deceived—disillusioned."

"There were no reasons for suicide known to you?"

"Nothing adequate, so far as I am aware. Stephane was fear-

less, wild, reckless. A man rather given to gambling with life. He would take audacious risks, and take them light-heartedly."

"That suggests a great zest for life?"

"Yes. He certainly was full of pep. But he was sometimes moody, though not perhaps more than most of us. He would occasionally express a disgust for life. But how far the disgust was really felt, and how far it was just talk, or merely the liver, I cannot pretend to say. In any case, he made the supreme gesture. That kind of settles the point, does it not, Commissaire?"

She looked at Saturnin directly. Her face was once more inscrutable.

"He had no money troubles?" said the Commissaire.

"I think not. But he never discussed business affairs with me. If he was in difficulties he knew he had only to ask me. Though, of course, in the circumstances and considering St. Remi, he might have hesitated." She smiled mirthlessly. "Men have their own code, and we women are often too stupid to understand these finer points of honour."

Saturnin grunted.

"Well, thank you, madame."

He rose slowly to his feet.

"I suppose he spoke English just as well as you do, madame?"

"Yes. It had become his natural, habitual language."

"Just so. He commonly read English, I suppose? Shakespeare, for example . . . ?"

Estelle Prad smiled again, her eyes followed those of Saturnin's fixed upon a book-shelf at the other side of the room.

"I gave him the pocket edition of Shakespeare when we were engaged, and he often carried one about with him."

"He had one with him when he died, had he not?"

"Yes."

Saturnin crossed the room and looked at the crowded shelf. There were books in English, French and Russian. A set of small, leather-bound Shakespearian plays lacked a copy of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Commissaire's eyes went quickly, here and there, about the room, through the half-closed door beyond. A writing desk with paper and pens stood beneath the book-shelf.

"Is this ink supplied by the hotel, madame?"

Saturnin turned to look at the woman, who appeared surprised.

"Yes. It is quite good ink, I fancy. In any case I do little writing."

"Quite so. Thank you, madame. I regret having to worry you at such a time as this. But a routine inquiry has to be made, you will comprehend."

He moved towards the door by which he had entered, while Estelle Prad followed him.

"Certainly, I quite understand, Commissaire. Thank you."

"Many thanks for the clear and frank way in which you have answered my questions. Good day, madame. Please do not trouble to come to the door . . ."

Saturnin went out. He closed the door behind him, and then stood perfectly still, listening intently. Within the suite behind him he heard steps and a man's rather high-pitched voice.

"He has gone?"

"Yes. Listen, dear, I believe . . ."

Estelle Prad's voice ceased abruptly as though in response to some warning, some mute signal bidding her speak no further.

Without turning his head Saturnin Dax walked off, away from the suite, down the single flight of wide, shallow, thickly-carpeted stairs, to the great halls with their elevators, offices, palms, show-cases. Here the Commissaire sat at a little desk, dipped a pen in the ink and wrote on the hotel's elegant writing-paper. Some kind of under-manager stared, and came a little coldly at Saturnin's summons.

"Does the hotel supply this same ink in all rooms, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Without exception? In the suite of Madame Prad then?"

"Evidently, monsieur. The only exception arises when one of our guests desires some particular ink and buys it, or instructs us to buy it. That has not been the case with Madame Prad, as I happen to know, monsieur."

"Thank you."

Saturnin nodded, and, folding the paper he had written upon, he thrust it into an overcoat pocket.

"Not at all, monsieur. The ink and the paper are at the disposal of our guests."

The under-manager glared, smiled in what he felt to be a devastatingly ironical fashion, and walked off towards the reception offices. Saturnin sat on. He had settled his bulk in a secluded chair and he smoked a cigarette. From the position he had taken up, he could see all the elevator-shafts, and a mirror reflected for him the Champs Elysées entrance of the hotel.

Three cigarettes Saturnin had smoked before he saw the person he had expected to see. A man descended in a lift and walked through the great vestibule and out of the Hotel Monseigneur. There was a red carnation in his buttonhole, and the man was Guy Lorrain.

CHAPTER TEN: SATURNIN DAX DISCUSSES

"Je pretends dire le bien et le mal, sans dissimuler la vérité."—

TALLEMANT DES REAUX

"Of course there may be no connection between those two events," said Saturnin Dax. "But in our job any striking coincidence demands serious consideration. And robbery and murder at the Lorrain-Prad Bank, followed immediately by the sudden death of Stephane Prad, looks to me very much like striking coincidence."

The Commissaire was in the private office of the Chief of Judicial

Police. Saturnin sat smoking a cigarette, whilst the Chief, with fanatical patience, strove to undo knots in the string that secured a papered package.

"You don't think," said the Chief, "that Prad had any hand in the bank-robbery? The man was a gambler, eh? Reckless type. Old Lorrain wanted to get rid of Prad,—we don't really know why. Suppose Prad instigated the burglary, and let the crooks have access to his keys. Then,—something goes wrong. Prad finds himself double-crossed; and maybe in danger of being exposed. So he takes the easiest way out. And his little mistress, temperamental, hard up herself, and dependent on her man, is ready to commit suicide with him. How does that strike you?"

Saturnin nodded slowly.

"Certainly something went wrong with the bank-robbery. The Rolla brothers were shot dead. No doubt they would regard that as a mistake. But, someone else might not. Someone else,—someone rather clever—has got away with several million francs."

The Chief frowned thoughtfully.

"This unknown could not be Prad, though. If he got the millions surely he would remain alive? You don't think Prad was actually engaged himself in this burglary, Commissaire?"

"No."

Saturnin blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Whatever Prad may have originally planned or connived at, I fancy he must ultimately be regarded as a victim. If he was assisting crooks with his keys why not give them keys of the safes? They had access only to one key, that which opened a vault door. I examined this key, on Prad's ring, and discovered slight traces of wax . . ."

"Ah! Someone got at Prad's keys. Someone who had time just to take an impression of a single key,—the most important. That looks like one of the clerks. An inside confederate."

"The bank-clerks are not being forgotten," said Saturnin. "Meanwhile I am wondering if I was meant to see that wax on Prad's keys, in fact I am asking myself just how deep this affair goes."

"*Mes aieux!*"

The Chief looked up quickly, from his knots.

"But then, if Prad has been a victim all along, it is not so easy to connect the robbery with his suicide."

"Stephane Prad," said Saturnin, "never committed suicide. Nor did his mistress. They were murdered."

"Truly?"

The Chief, not an easy man to excite or even interest, now stared very hard. His delicate eyebrows rose, and his pale face flushed. He so far lost control of himself, that he whipped out a penknife and slashed the string he had been untying; though usually, he would as soon cut a throat as a sound piece of string.

"Of course, Commissaire, you have evidence for that?"

Saturnin shrugged.

"I think so. Satisfies me. The note on the door, for example. Written in block capitals—why?—if not to conceal handwriting? Envelope from Monseigneur Hotel. Easy to obtain, but gives colour to the suggestion that Prad wrote that note. Yet I am convinced he didn't."

"Ah!"

"The note was headed: *Attention!* That is a Frenchman's idea of English. Prad spoke English as his natural tongue. He would not have written *Attention*, but 'Warning.' Then, the note was pinned too high. Prad was short, his mistress shorter. Yet the suicide note was pinned almost at the level of my eyes. The pin was driven down into the door with some force."

"Yes, yes. That seems sound enough."

"Also," went on Saturnin. "There are no finger-prints on the suicide note, and the operator made another mistake: the ink he employed does not match that used in the villa by Clemence Bouquet, or that in the fountain-pen of Stephane Prad. Incidentally the ink used in the Hotel Monseigneur doesn't match either."

"Good! Very good! That would appear decisive, Commissaire."

"I think so," Saturnin agreed. "Clemence Bouquet used a violet ink; that in Prad's fountain-pen was blue-black, of a galletannic variety. But the suicide-note was written in an ordinary black ink. When I noticed how high that note had been placed I looked around for confirmation that Prad had never written it."

The Chief nodded, staring thoughtfully before him.

"Evidently someone has murdered Prad, and perhaps that someone was concerned with Prad in the bank-robbery and double-crossed him. The unknown was unscrupulous enough to kill the woman as well, so that murder might pass for suicide. It would, I suppose, not be very difficult to enter this villa at St. Remi, and do so without leaving a trace?"

"A child could open the ground-floor windows," said Saturnin.

"Also Clemence Bouquet and her maid had the common, idiot-habit of leaving keys under the front-door mat. They call that 'hiding' the keys. But, without such help, anyone could get in."

"So!"

The Chief had opened his packet, revealing a box of choice cigars which he glanced at rather abstractedly.

"The working hypothesis would seem to be that the murderer watched the maid, Helene, leave the villa. Then he entered and drugged the wine or the coffee, left in the boudoir for supper, eh?"

"It is certain the coffee was drugged," Saturnin pointed out.

"With one of the barbiturates—nembutal, the doctor states. Fairly tasteless in a cup of strong, black coffee, which, in any case, would be quickly drunk. But, of course, the drugging of the coffee would not be inconsistent with suicide. One does not, after all, desire a lively consciousness of one's decease, however firmly bent upon it. A drug could logically be employed to assist the

action of the charcoal. The unknown operator knew we'd find the traces of drugged coffee and he knew he need not mind that. But other factors convinced me murder had been done."

"Yes, yes. No doubt but what you are right, Commissaire. We may assume a murderer drugged this coffee. Later, he returns to the villa, and, with his victims in a drugged sleep, he plugs doors and windows, opens the stove, pins the prepared note to the door, and departs. Very efficient."

"Yes—except for the ink. The technical department may yet get him on that ink—provided I discover a few other trifling facts."

The Chief smiled. He selected a cigar carefully. With long white fingers he pressed delicately the unbroken end of the cigar until it cracked, and then he lit up.

"And the motive? You think there is a link between the double-murder and the bank-robbery, Commissaire?"

Saturnin pursed his lips.

"I have an instinctive feeling that there is a connection. But I have no satisfactory evidence. If Prad was really concerned in the bank-robbery then he might get murdered. Perhaps after he got his share of the spoils. Perhaps by the gentleman who escaped from the vault. But I am not convinced of Prad's participation in the bank-robbery. Why should he rob a bank of which he was a director?"

"The answer would be because old Lorrain was kicking out his new and younger partner. For some shameful reason, perhaps. Some reason which the old man conceals out of respect for the memory of Stephane Prad's father."

"Yes . . ." said Saturnin, doubtfully. "It could be. But we have no evidence."

"Prad was reckless—a gambler, eh?"

"He belonged to the Lido Club, which is by no means exclusively a gambling club; people go there to swim, to dance, feed, and so on. We need more facts about Prad. Indisputable facts. A man may be reckless, gamble a bit, carry on with women, and yet never become a criminal of the type to concern us."

"Evidently. And there is a man who got out of the bank-vault with millions of francs. He is the man we want. He seems to have got wounded, eh? But Prad had no wound. It is unlikely, in any case, that Prad took any actual part in the safe-smashing job. But he may have been murdered by this unknown who was in the job, and got away. Whoever killed Prad and the woman knew quite a lot about Prad. He knew, for example, a great deal about this liaison which Prad carefully concealed."

"Yes. But the liaison was not hidden as well as Prad imagined," said Saturnin. "There's cunning and brains behind this affair. We want more facts before we can form a satisfactory theory."

The Commissaire crossed to a window and looked down upon the Seine where an orange, evening sunshine gilded the water, tugs and barges, the soaring gulls, the trees, sidewalks and buildings.

"Ah! The liaison was known. Yes, of course, the murderer must have known a lot about what went on at St. Remi. But, surely there is our real motive Commissaire? There was a wife, now a widow. A beautiful woman, I believe. Probably we are confronted with a crime of passion at St. Remi. After all there is no connection between the robbed bank and the faked suicides, eh?"

"That," Saturnin insisted, "must always be held in mind. The most remarkable thing about a coincidence is that it happens. Yet, to me, a coincidence must always be held suspect until it proves itself innocent. However, in actual fact Prad's wife hired an inquiry-agent, named Chartrettes, to watch her husband. This fellow, Chartrettes, was in a lane behind the villa at about the time when the faked suicide was being staged. And the agent's reputation is none too good."

"Truly! But then, surely . . .?"

"Nothing is sure."

Saturnin turned from the window and shook his head.

"Chartrettes is a little man. Short. He never pinned that note to the door. He is not the stuff of which daring murderers are made, nor even bank-robbers. But a little blackmail might well be in his line. In fact he has discovered something in St. Remi, or thinks he has."

"Ah! He was in a lane, near the villa. He may have seen the murderer, or murderers, actually get in?"

"Possibly. His story is that he saw Madame Prad in St. Remi on the fatal evening. Said she looked murderous. As a matter of fact, Estelle Prad was in St. Remi that evening. I could prove it now, but she admits it, anyway. Yet I don't think she murdered her husband."

"You think this animal, Chartrettes, is lying, Commissaire? Concealing something, and shielding somebody in a hope to get blackmail? But Madame employed the inquiry agent. When he revealed the truth to her, might she not get mad with jealousy and want to kill?"

"She might. But Chartrettes badly wants me to believe just that. Also he is lying, and holding something back. Also I am not convinced the fair Estelle would be so maddened by the revealed infidelity of her husband. She might welcome the news."

"Ah! Madame herself has a lover?"

"Well, there is a certain understanding and tenderness between her and Guy Lorrain. I don't know how deep is the feeling . . ."

"*Mes aieux!* But, if they are lovers, then the St. Remi affair may still be a crime of passion. Even if the woman would not kill perhaps Guy Lorrain would, eh?"

Saturnin nodded.

"This is about the point we have arrived at. To get any further we require fresh facts. I don't quite visualise Guy Lorrain as a killer. I don't care for his appearance, but, like Chartrettes, I don't think the young banker is up to the murder standard. But, I may be wrong. When I met him, just after the bank-tragedy, I detected

something curious in his manner. He was not merely shocked by the outrage ; he was also uneasy, disconcerted, if not frightened."

"Ah! That seems queer."

"Yes. There are a number of points we shall have to explain. One of these is the precise relationship between Guy Lorrain and Estelle Prad. I am told the lady admires Guy. Does he admire her ? Or does he admire her fortune, which is considerable ?"

"Yes, yes. That, too, might explain Prad's murder. Chartrettes may have seen Guy Lorrain entering the St. Remi villa that evening. With or without Estelle Prad. Who knows ? Guy Lorrain may not look formidable, but how many murderers who pass through our hands look as though they would kill with violence ? A man will do a lot to win a beautiful woman with a large fortune."

"Without doubt," Saturnin agreed. "The case, or two cases, are full of possibilities. Guy Lorrain is tall enough to have pinned that suicide-note at the required height. But there's no evidence he was in St. Remi, and two of my best men have been on the job there. Perhaps, if Chartrettes is given his head, he may lead us somewhere. Meanwhile, I shall not leap to conclusions. The bank-robbery was emphatically a professional affair. It involved the Rolla brothers, now deceased. But there are one or two singular points even in that seemingly straight-forward, safe-smashing job."

"Truly ?"

The Chief looked up quickly.

"The business of the keys," said Saturnin, slowly. "It leaves me dissatisfied. And then, the marksmanship of the dead watchman, Degray, seems to have been very accurate."

"*Mon Dieu !* But there can be no doubt he shot those burglars, surely ? They were killed by shots from the 9 mm. Mauser found beside Degray, with his finger-prints on the butt, eh ?"

"Yes, yes. But the shooting was remarkably good. Three shots fired, and two killed and a third wounded. And the light was not too good, whilst the range was at least twenty metres. And the man who shot so well, must have fired quickly, for he himself received five wounds : two in the neck and three in the stomach. Also an unknown man got away. With millions of francs. It seems that he also put a shot into Degray before making off. A shot from a Victoria—a Spanish automatic. The shot would be fatal, the doctor says. That will help us, if we find the man with this gun."

"But . . ." The Chief looked puzzled. "The Rolla brothers were killed by the Mauser whilst our unknown used a Victoria pistol. Are you suggesting a fourth crook was in the cellar ? Do you think this fourth crook shot Degray and then the Rolla Brothers and afterwards got away with the man who used the Victoria ? It would be possible, I suppose ? Two crooks might plan to double-cross the Rolla brothers. Or there may be a quarrel after Degray had come on the scene and been murdered."

"Yes, we are faced with many possibilities," said Saturnin. "So far we have not been able to trace the Mauser pistol, either to

Degray or to anyone else. The facts are that two burglars died in the bank-vault. One, at least, got out of that vault. Another, looking like an Oriental, was seen outside, with a motor-van, and he might previously have been inside the bank. This we get from Pierre Degray's evidence, which I believe. And we found traces of the van. Well, well. . . ."

Saturnin looked down at the river in the dying sun and at the gulls swooping to the water in search of food.

"There are plenty of questions. Was Degray an excellent marksman? Or did he make some lucky shots? Can we trace the Mauser? Can we find the wounded man who apparently got out of the vault with the money? Can we get his accomplice or accomplices? Can we trace the stolen securities? Does Stephane Prad's murder link up with the bank-robbery, or was it a separate crime—a crime of passion? Why was Prad leaving the bank? Incapacity, or something worse? Where does Guy Lorrain come in? What is his relationship with Estelle Prad, now widowed? Plenty of questions: but we want more facts."

"Just so, Commissaire."

The Chief frowned over the firm, grey ash of his cigar.

"Probably the most important line of inquiry is this unknown and wounded man, who escaped—no doubt with the money—from the vault. If we can lay hands on him the whole affair will become a lot clearer."

Saturnin shrugged.

"Yes. That is a matter of routine work, for the most part. But we happen to have in our hands an animal named Francois Jesick. Also a burglar by profession. But for our untimely attentions Jesick, I think, would have played his part in the Lorrain-Prad Bank raid. In fact it looks to me as though, when the Rolla brothers could not get Jesick, they looked elsewhere for help. So I think we shall let Jesick loose and watch him closely."

"Ah, good! You think he will lead us to these unknown partners of the Rolla brothers?"

"Well, it is quite likely. Jesick at the moment knows nothing definite about the bank-robbery. When released he will hear the news, plus quite a lot of rumours, no doubt. I fancy he will wish to know more; to learn the whole truth. And he will probably seek out those who can tell him. Anyway, it's a chance. . . ."

CHAPTER ELEVEN: TRIALS OF AN EXILE

*"Betrayed and fugitive, I still must roam
A world where sin, and beauty whisper of Home."*

—WALTER DE LA MARE

IN his natty uniform of olive green Bert Williams stood beside a small, closed car which shone like a new pin. The automobile was

one that Monsieur Edouard Lorrain used for town work, to run about to theatre and restaurant. The machine now stood in the Avenue Hoche before the banker's *appartement*. Bert Williams, a Players cigarette hanging from his upper lip, gazed critically at bonnet and paint work. For technical and for personal reasons Bert disliked occasions when the little runabout was used. It possessed but a single door at each side and the confined space meant that the chauffeur in his front seat was separated very little from his employer on the back seat. Old Lorrain often talked to his chauffeur, and this was a habit Bert frowned upon. Bert was naturally cautious, taciturn, efficient, and self-sufficing. Speaking to the man at the wheel was something condemned by Bert's code. In any case, to be brutally frank, Bert was not keen on foreigners, even when they could speak English. Fifteen years residence in France had not made the chauffeur any less of an island product. But he did his best. During those years he had taught many foreigners some useful English phrases. And, if accent and vowel-sounds were a trifle unorthodox, this was not Bert's fault. Having been born a Cockney when he saw a spade he called it a "spyde," but in most other respects he was accurate and even punctilious. Actually Bert spoke French quite well, for he was no fool.

But he was seldom heard to speak the language of France. Questioned about this once, by a fellow-exile, Bert explained that he found his use of the French tongue was apt to encourage familiarity.

No one knew how Bert happened to be domiciled and working so far from the sound of Bow bells. Perhaps a woman had been concerned. It was not likely to be anything more serious—or less. However, Bert had immediately discovered just where he could buy Players cigarettes and Bass; he knew restaurants that specialised in underdone beef and steak and kidney pudding. With his foot resting on the brass rail before an English-looking bar, surrounded by British chauffeurs, British commercial advertisements, food, drink, and tobacco-smoke, Bert Williams was not unhappy.

Now, as he looked over the little run-about he sighed philosophically. The order for the small car meant pottering around in town instead of a good run. Probably the governor was going to dine somewhere in the Bois, for it was not a bad evening. This would mean, for Bert, some hours of waiting. But, in his pocket, he had the Paris *Daily Mail* which he had been saving up; and the car possessed radio that Bert, once alone, could tune in to London.

The chauffeur straightened up and pitched away his cigarette as Edouard Lorrain came from the grey stone building and crossed the wide pavement. The old man was resplendent and even rather jaunty and youthful in evening clothes and a black, soft felt hat.

"Ah, Villiams. My son has telephoned me from the Chateau de Madrid. I shall join him there for dinner. But first to the *tabac* in the Avenue Wagram. I need some cigars."

"Yes, sir," said Bert.

He opened the long door, watched the banker settle in the back

seat, and then got to the driving-wheel. Dusk was falling quickly and lights appeared everywhere. By the time the banker had bought his cigars the streets were ablaze and sounds of music came from many of the cafés now filled with diners.

"A cigar, Villiams? *Voilà.*"

"Thank you, sir."

Bert took the cigar and placed it carefully in an outside breast-pocket of his tunic. He turned the car, crossed the Place des Ternes and was soon cutting through the Rue St. Ferdinand to the Porte de Neuilly.

In the Bois de Boulogne, beneath the trees, it was dark, and the avenues further away from the centre of the city were still and deserted. The weather was definitely autumnal, and later there would be a nip of frost in the night air. Most Parisians had begun to desert the cafés and restaurants of the Bois and return to the resorts of the boulevards with their enclosed *terrasses* and central heating.

"It becomes a little cold already for the Bois, eh, Villiams?" said Edouard Lorrain. "But I suppose you young men do not feel it. Ah, youth, youth!"

Bert grunted, whilst the banker sang softly, in a fine baritone, a song that spoke of young love fulfilled and triumphant. Bert's face set woodenly, and he sounded his horn, an action he very seldom performed. A motor-cyclist had swerved across the road from out of the shadows and passed within a couple of metres of Bert's off-side mudguard.

Edouard Lorrain laughed.

"Villiams! Is it possible you do not like my singing? In that case I must give it up. Good chauffeurs are rare but singers like myself are only too common, *hélas.*"

"Motor-cyclist, sir," explained Bert. "I should sye he was drunk, the perisher! There!"

With a Bow-bells oath Bert threw on his brakes, for the motor-cyclist had swerved once more, and, at the same time, a car coming from the opposite direction also swerved and stopped.

"Blimey, they're *all* drunk!" said Bert.

"Or ill," said the banker. "I think there is some difficulty. Perhaps you had better stop."

In fact the motor-cyclist had dismounted, propped up his machine, and was waving his hand. Bert checked and pulled in to the kerb, lowering the window on his right.

"What's the trouble?" he said, in his uncompromising, Britannic fashion.

At the English tones the motor-cyclist seemed to hesitate a little. He wore a helmet and goggles and was swathed in dusty overalls. He muttered something and produced a map from his pocket.

"What's up?" repeated Bert. "Lost yourself?"

Edouard Lorrain chuckled.

"Now, Villiams, here is an opportunity to employ the French you speak so well, my friend. *Allons!*"

Red as a beetroot and smothering fiery oaths Bert asked his simple question in French. At the same time he was becoming convinced that the motor-cyclist was drunk. Without a word this individual opened a Michelin guide and muttered something incomprehensible. Perhaps, Bert thought, the man was not French.

Might be a Russian or a dago. All kinds of Tower of Babel complexities presented themselves to Bert's mind as he looked at the book in the other's hands.

"Bois de Boulogne," said Bert. "Ten minutes to Porte de Neuilly. *Dix minutes*, savvy?"

He very kindly raised his voice and held up eight fingers and two thumbs.

The motor-cyclist still muttered vaguely and turned pages in his book. Bending to look, Bert was suddenly conscious of a draught, that indicated the off-side door of the car was opening. He imagined his employer was opening the door possibly to alight and look at the Michelin guide, or merely to stretch his legs. But suddenly, behind Bert, there came a scuffle and a muffled cry in the tones of Edouard Lorrain.

"Help! Help!"

Bert Williams made a movement to turn, but, in a flash the motor-cyclist dropped his book and gripped Bert's throat. Vainly, Bert tried to shake the grip and to slide out of his seat. The driving wheel impeded his movements. The grip on his throat tightened as he tried to call out. It crossed his mind that the car which had halted across the road must be connected with this sudden hold-up. He wondered what was happening to his employer—what it was all about.

Then, his wondering and his conscious thinking ceased, for something crashed down on the back of his head. He pitched forward, limp and helpless in the motor-cyclist's grasp.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE POLICEMAN'S LOT . . .

"It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious."

—A. N. WHITEHEAD

VERY dapper in grey English tweeds, no overcoat, pigskin gloves and carrying a malacca cane, Felix Norman entered the office of Saturnin Dax. The Commissaire had his stove lit and the room was like an oven. He stood cheerfully baking himself, his back to the glowing metal.

"Well, milord? You have seen the English chauffeur?"

Felix nodded. He drew off his gloves, looking wistfully at the windows which were firmly sealed.

"The man is unconscious. Doctor says condition critical. His name is Bert Williams. Only a few months with Edouard Lorrain,

but Williams has excellent character and references. They took him to the American Hospital, where he is already known. He was there a year or two ago, with some minor trouble—tonsils, I think. Anyway, Williams cannot be implicated criminally in this affair: he will be lucky if he lives. I suppose there is no news of the banker?"

"None. It looks very much like a kidnapping case. We found the car, concealed in woods just off the road. Signs of a struggle. Lorrain's hat, trodden flat inside the car. Mud on the floor. Door handle wrenched—and so forth. Has Williams made no statement?"

"Only one. He said his employer told him to drive to the Chateau de Madrid because Guy Lorrain had telephoned from there and awaited his father, for dinner. I 'phoned Guy Lorrain who says he was not at the Madrid, and knows nothing of such a 'phone-call."

"You have been to the restaurant?"

"Yes. I just left there. They know Guy Lorrain. He often goes there in the summer. Has his favourite table and waiter. He was not there last night."

Felix took out a great calabash pipe and a pouch.

"It is pretty certain that Guy Lorrain was not there, even for a drink or a halt just to use the telephone."

Saturnin Dax grunted. He crossed to his desk, and, picking up a yellow packet of cigarettes, shook one loose and picked it out with his lips.

"So Guy Lorrain frequents the Chateau de Madrid, eh? Has he any regular companions?"

Felix shrugged.

"Women. An assorted collection of blondes and brunettes. Unknown to the *maître d'hôtel* who knows everyone of importance—social and artistic—in Paris. Quite often Guy dines with his father, who is known there, but is not properly speaking an *habitué*. The old man lives alone in a flat in the Avenue Hoche. The apartment-house supplies service—meals, a valet, anything required."

Felix had his pipe alight and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"This is a queer business," he said. "Why should old Lorrain be kidnapped? Are our apaches imitating American methods, or have Yankee crooks come over here because things are too hot for them in the States? It beats me. Do you think there's any connection between this affair of last night and the bank robbery, or the St. Remi murder?"

"It is not impossible," said Saturnin, drily. "Anyhow we have to find Edouard Lorrain. The spot where the hold-up took place seems to have been located, all right, but it yields nothing useful in the shape of a clue. In running the car from the road to the woods the operators left plenty of tracks, but these give us practically nothing. A motor-cycle zig-zagged about and seems to have played a part . . . But I think we should do better approaching the problem from another angle. Perhaps the English chauffeur

will soon be able to speak. Meanwhile, it might be a good idea if you returned to the Chateau de Madrid. Try and get descriptions of everyone, guests or employees, who used the telephones between six and half-past eight. A tall order, but do your best, my boy. With luck you may get something useful."

Saturnin opened a drawer in his desk. He took out a cabinet photograph of Estelle Prad, a likeness which showed her in an evening gown, and which bore the name of a famous Paris photographer.

"Also, take this, my boy. Find out whether one of the ladies favoured by Guy Lorrain is our attractive widow."

Felix stared as he took the photograph.

"Surely you don't think . . . ?"

"I don't," said Saturnin. "I have merely a desire to gain facts. Clear, indisputable facts. And as many of them as I can get. For the moment my mind is a blank."

A few minutes after Felix had left the office Brigadier Georges Alder entered it. The dark-complexioned, rather grim-looking officer accepted a cigarette and sat down, loosening his black mackintosh.

He shook his head.

"I haven't got much, *patron*," he said. "Somehow or other Francois Jesick has been warned to watch his step."

"Ah! "

Saturnin's face showed no sign of disappointment.

"Where did he go, Georges ?"

"He has installed himself in the Rue Nollet, in the ninth *arrondissement*. A small, cheap hotel, called the Hotel d'Ivry. He has no visitors, has neither received nor posted letters, and has not used the telephone. He lies in bed till noon. But he goes every afternoon to the Café du Theatre in the Rue de Clichy. Also to a little local cinema, called The Select, every night."

"Every night, eh ?"

"Yes. He has seen the same film five times. So have I, and it's lousy. He always gets a seat in the back row of the circle. No one has ever joined him, and I'll take my oath no one has spoken to him, or passed him a note. Yet he's been warned—probably by some prearranged signal. He is not behaving normally. Always he is on the look-out, so that he is not easy to shadow. Pellegrin takes over when I quit."

Saturnin scribbled a shorthand note, and thoughtfully brushed his moustache, left and right, with a broad thumb.

"If Jesick is difficult perhaps we'd better change you over, Georges. You can have a turn very soon watching Emile Chartrettes. By the way, you thought of the possibility of Jesick receiving a letter at this Café du Theatre, I suppose ?"

I did *patron*. They take in letters for clients, and stick 'em up on the usual sort of board, but there hasn't been one for Jesick. Obviously he expected to meet someone, either in the café or the

cinema. Probably an arrangement was made by which Jesick was to give no sign unless he was first spoken to. Meanwhile he sticks around these places in the Rue de Clichy and goes nowhere else. He's bored to death—that's plain enough. And I can sympathise."

Brigadier Georges Alder got to his feet.

"Well, I suppose I must see that sacred film again, to-night. It's all about a pure woman's love and how it changes the heart of a bully who escapes from the Foreign Legion."

"Sounds good stuff, Georges," Saturnin laughed.

The other uttered a rude word.

"Jesick has the best of it. He can go to sleep."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: SATURNIN DAX IS AMUSED

"Clever people have always a little malice against the stupid."

—WALTER BAGEHOT

GUY LORRAIN was shown into the office of Saturnin Dax and entered at a kind of a breathless trot. The banker scarcely waited for the door to be closed before he cried out:

"Commissaire! A terrible thing has happened. An incredible thing! My father has been kidnapped!"

Saturnin had risen gravely to his feet but seated himself again when the younger man half fell into a chair. Guy Lorrain's clothes were as elegant as usual; his fair hair was plastered down with toilet-water; he wore a lilac tie, and a gardenia in his button-hole. Nevertheless his face was white and strained and he looked like a man who was missing his proper quota of sleep.

"Kidnapping," said Saturnin, "was indicated by the automobile affair in the Bois, the attack on the English chauffeur and so on: in fact it was about the only interpretation . . . Have you come to tell me that you have had some communication from the kidnappers, monsieur?"

"Yes. This morning."

Guy Lorrain undid a fur-collared overcoat. From a breast-pocket he took a letter and put it on the desk before Saturnin.

"There, Commissaire!"

Saturnin picked up the cheap green-grey envelope delicately. The letter had been posted in the second *arrondissement*. It was addressed in a bold, sweeping script to Guy Lorrain at the Lorrain-Prad Bank.

"Is this your father's handwriting, monsieur?"

"Yes. Without doubt. I could not be mistaken. The letter has been posted, you see, in the second *arrondissement*, a busy neighbourhood, too busy to provide a clue. *Seigneur Dieu!* I fear for my father, Commissaire, I fear terribly for him. Read the letter. Read it—you will see!"

Saturnin appeared to be in no hurry. He examined the envelope very closely, even using a pocket-lens and smelling the paper.

"The paper and envelope are of the cheapest, Commissaire," said Guy, impatiently. "Anywhere one could buy such stuff; any little café provides it."

Saturnin finally drew the letter from its envelope. He used a pair of tweezers taken from a drawer in his desk. With scrupulous care he unfolded a sheet of common writing-paper and laid it flat on his desk. The paper was of the cheapest variety, divided into squares as though for school-children's geometry. There was no address, only a date inscribed in the same bold script. Saturnin read:

My dear son,

I have been kidnapped and must write to you, at the bidding of my captors, to ask you to pay ransom. The sum they demand is 100,000 francs. Much depends upon your courage, intelligence and discretion. On no account go to the police or attempt to play tricks with my captors, who are formidable and ruthless men. I beg of you, my dear Guy, to carry out the following instructions most scrupulously.

First, go to-morrow at noon to the Place de l'Opera. Take this letter with you. Standing before the Metro station entrance, with your back to the descending steps, take out your lighter or matches and burn this letter. See that both letter and envelope are entirely destroyed, and that your movements in doing this are plainly visible.

Secondly hire an automobile and arrange to drive to-morrow night to a little auberge situated between Fourche and St. Remi, an auberge called *Au Marin d'eau douce*. There you will dismiss your car and send it back to Paris. You must arrive at the auberge at eleven, and stay there half an hour. Then you will walk along the main road, in the direction of Fourche, for almost a kilometre. Here there are cross-roads and you will not pass these crossroads but wait there. In your pocket you will have 100,000 francs in notes of small denomination, nothing larger than a note for 100 francs. Do all these things most carefully as you love me.

I count on you, and I embrace you,
Your unhappy father,

Edouard Lorrain.

P.S.: Above all—discretion!

Saturnin read this letter through so slowly that he might have been committing the words to memory. Finally he lifted his eyes from the paper and looked directly at his visitor.

"Well? What do you want us to do?"

"What . . . ?"

Guy Lorrain flushed angrily under the stare and the unpromising brusqueness of the Commissaire's speech.

"But, of course, I desire that you do everything possible to arrest these kidnapping scoundrels. I want to see justice done, Monsieur le Commissaire. I presume that justice is not unknown even in the Quai des Orfèvres, *hein?*"

Saturnin nodded.

"Justice is known here. Yes, it may be found, Monsieur Lorrain."

The Commissaire lit a cigarette, and glanced at the letter.

"You suggest a trap, monsieur? You would act ostensibly as though carrying out the kidnapper's instructions quite faithfully, whilst I lay a trap. Good. You have considered the danger to your father, of course?"

Guy Lorrain again flushed very red; then his face paled. He played nervously with the gold-rimmed monocle that swung on a fine cord.

"I have considered that," he said, in a low tone. "It is very dreadful. But would I be justified in submitting to blackmail? And, if I should pay, could I trust these criminals? *Seigneur Dieu!* Kidnappers! American gangsters, *hein?* How do I know that when I go to this lonely spot with the money they will not snatch it and then laugh at me? How do I know they will not murder me!"

"Perfectly," Saturnin said. "Honour among thieves is a myth. It is agreed then that I lay a trap. You may rely upon me. I suppose you have not the sum of 100,000 francs on your person? No. Well, you will let me have the notes as soon as possible, please. Our technical laboratory will mark them for us."

"Ah! Invisible markings . . . ? Just as some of the modern laundries use?"

"Yes. That is a first step. We must not only catch our birds, we must have evidence against them. By the way, why Fourche and St. Remi?"

"I beg your pardon?"

Once more Guy Lorrain's naturally pale face reddened.

"I don't understand, Commissaire."

"The kidnappers' rendezvous is for a stretch of road between Fourche and St. Remi. I ask myself, why? Does it not suggest that these bandits are familiar with every twist and turn of the roads around those Paris suburbs, monsieur?"

"Yes. . . . Yes. I suppose it does."

"In which case the kidnappers are very possibly not Americans. Perhaps our apaches are beginning to imitate the methods of the Yankee crook, eh? The influence of the films perhaps?"

"Yes. It might be. Though many Americans know Paris and its environs extremely well. In any case, if we can contrive to catch these animals we shall know very soon their nationality."

"True. True. Well, monsieur, if you will let me have the notes for 100,000 francs—that is the first step. I will make my arrangements. They must be marked and sent back to you before

noon to-morrow ; before you go to the Place de l'Opera to destroy your father's letter, of rather one resembling it, for this one I must keep."

"Yes. . . . Thank you, Commissaire. I will send a trusted clerk with the notes you require."

Guy Lorrain rose rather slowly, and almost reluctantly, to his feet. He picked up a pair of grey gloves that he had placed on a corner of the desk and he began to pull on the gloves and button them, in a manner suggesting nervousness and abstraction.

"I must return to the bank. Everything now devolves upon Paul Neveux and myself. You . . . you will do your utmost, Commissaire, *n'est-ce-pas* ? My father's safety, perhaps his very life, depends upon the swiftness and sureness of your actions between now and tomorrow night. It is a dreadful situation! "

Saturnin smiled.

"Do not worry, monsieur. You are perhaps disturbed by my aplomb, eh ? I should perhaps pace the room, telephone messages here and there, call in my subordinates. . . . Believe me, you have more to hope from my sangfroid, which proceeds not from indifference or apathy but from professional training and habitude. I shall act, not only swiftly and surely, but with complete discretion."

"Ah! Thank you, monsieur. That reassures me. I am grateful."

"I am not a monster, you see. Not dehumanised, monsieur, by the evils and miseries and the cunning people encountered in my vile *métier*. No, no. I shall act with great discretion. And you ? "

"Pardon ? "

Guy Lorrain who had picked up his hat with a smile, stood rigid at the sudden question, and the smile was wiped from his lips.

"I don't quite. . . . ? "

"You are, of course, taking your precautions also, monsieur, eh ? Since your father's life is at stake. You have called here, in full daylight, and by the main entrance, I suppose ? But, from now on, you will be very discreet, eh ? The clerk you send with the money must take his precautions. In fact perhaps one of my men had better come along to the bank with a cheque which I will sign. We must think of everything. Do not telephone me. If you wish to communicate very urgently get in touch with my home, at Meudon Val Fleury. But it will scarcely be necessary. We will arrange everything. Carry out the instructions in the letter and leave the rest to me. Not a word or a step must be indiscreet. Your father's life is at stake, monsieur."

"Yes. I understand. And . . . and thank you, monsieur."

Guy Lorrain left the office, and, when he had gone, Saturnin lit a fresh cigarette and once more narrowly scrutinized Edouard Lorrain's letter. The Commissaire rose, crossed to attend to his stove, and then began to pace the floor. As he walked to and fro his eyes were glazed with abstraction and he hummed softly a motif from the "Unfinished Symphony." It was fully fifteen

minutes before he roused himself to telephone the technical laboratory and hand over to them the letter of Edouard Lorrain.

At noon on the following day, Guy Lorrain, standing in the Place de l'Opera with his back to the entrance steps of the Metro, openly burned an envelope and sheet of paper which looked, even under close scrutiny, exactly like the letter of his kidnapped father. On the same night the young man travelled by automobile to the auberge of the "Freshwater Sailor." Here Guy Lorrain spent half an hour over a glass of good old brandy, having paid off his hired car and sent it back to Paris.

In fact Guy Lorrain punctiliously carried out the instructions conveyed to him; and he walked, alone, a kilometre along the deserted road until he came to the dark and silent cross-roads. Here he waited, shivering and blue with cold, pacing about with his fur collar upturned and beating together his gloved hands. For more than three hours Guy Lorrain waited at the rendezvous, but no one came to him, no automobile passed him. No sound was heard of car or pedestrian.

"Something seemed to go wrong," complained Felix Norman to his superior officer on the following morning. "Looks as though the kidnappers smelt a rat. But I'll swear we made no mistakes on our side."

"Of course not, my boy," said Saturnin. "I know you carried out instructions admirably."

To the surprise of Felix there was no querulous note in Saturnin's voice and no sign even of disappointment. In fact, he smiled to himself as if he found the whole affair mildly amusing.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: CAFE DU THEATRE

*"Reaping, still reaping—
All things with heedful hook
Timely I gather."*—W. E. HENLEY

SATURNIN DAX lunched well, and in his opinion wisely, at the Café du Théâtre in the Rue de Clichy. It was only a little after midday and the café-restaurant was almost empty. A short, bullet-headed proprietor moved around with a keen eye on the waiter who attended the Commissaire, for good clients who ordered the finer wines were becoming rare and should be pampered.

Before usury, aided by machinery, turned civilization into an endurance test the Café du Théâtre had been a rendez-vous for artists, wits, and *flaneurs*. There were still some famous murals to be seen and also framed pictures hung on the walls and these could be bought by anyone fancying such purchase. But the

glory had departed. The artists could not afford meals at the café and the proprietor could not afford to lower his prices. The wits were no longer in evidence and had probably been superseded by those anonymous wise-cracks, canned and exported by the democracy of Hollywood, that great clearing-house for plagiarism. As for the *flâneurs*, anyone who insists upon sauntering, in the age of petrol-driven engines, is not long for this world. Nevertheless a certain "atmosphere" still clung to these painted walls and yellow plush-covered *banquettes*, lingering like some perfume that stirs the olfactory nerve and quickens for us memories of a woman by whom our adolescence was once held in thrall.

Saturnin, too, discovered personal memories of this very café, and he sighed in comfortable, replete nostalgia as he took the napkin from his collar. The proprietor advanced towards him.

"Monsieur has lunched satisfactorily?"

"Perfect! And a good coffee and a glass of *marc* will complete a repast worthy of Lucullus."

The *patron* flushed with pleasure.

"You are Commissaire Dax of the First Mobile Brigade, *n'est-ce-pas?* I saw your photographs in the journals, in connection with the Isidore Weiss affair."

Quite soon the two men were discussing police-work and politics, the shortage of money and the slackness of café-business. The proprietor was seated at Saturnin's table. An enormous bottle of *marc* stood between them, amid an aroma of coffee and a cloud of tobacco-smoke. At the judicious moment Saturnin turned the talk towards his required information, and produced two photographs of Francois Jesick. The café-proprietor recognized Jesick at once.

"This man comes here every day now. But that is quite recent. I never saw him until a short time ago, and always he comes here alone."

"You have not seen him speak with anyone here? Or telephone, or receive a letter?"

"I have not. I would, of course, help if I could. . . ."

The waiters were questioned. They also recognized the photographs of Jesick, but they had never seen him with a companion or using the café telephone.

Saturnin, who had complete confidence in Georges Alder, had scarcely expected any other result, and he now tried another line of inquiry. He first asked the proprietor if he had read about the robbery and shootings at the Lorrain-Prad Bank. The proprietor had devoured this story in the newspapers and was thrilled at the idea of discussing it with a police-officer. Saturnin discreetly sketched a few facts, and then put a question.

"Since the date of that tragic affair have you missed some client who came here habitually?"

Saturnin deliberately refrained from adding any kind of description, but soon a rough likeness and in fact quite a personality

were evolved. The proprietor remembered a short, swarthy individual who came often to the Café du Théâtre before the bank-robbery, and had scarcely appeared since. This man spent money freely, which attracted attention. He tipped the waiter parsimoniously, however, and that too drew notice. This individual was of almost coffee-coloured complexion, with a skin pitted as though by some previous skin disease. He was clean-shaven but his dark hair was worn rather long. The waiter, who seemed to be an intelligent observer, was also brought into the discussion. Between waiter and *patron*, quite a number of useful details were recalled. After the bank-robbery this client had appeared once, looking pale and ill, and with his left arm slung in a black scarf. He had not been seen in the café since then.

The proprietor thought the client was from the south—Marseilles or Nice. But the waiter, himself from Nice (whereas the proprietor was Parisian), considered the client was Basque or Spanish. The proprietor said the client had a mouth full of splendid white teeth, that he dressed in expensive clothes though usually black, with a black hat. Also he wore rings on his fingers. The waiter added that the client carried a walking-stick which was made entirely of leather. Several times the waiter had handed to the client this leathern stick which was of unusual style.

"You did not remark the man's ears, I suppose?" said Saturnin, rather wistfully.

His informants had not noted this detail and looked astonished at the question. They differed, to, about the man's accent, the proprietor saying the client spoke like a Frenchman, the waiter insisting that he had some foreign accent—very soft, probably Spanish.

When he had extracted all the descriptive material possible concerning this unknown man's physical appearance, dress and manner, Saturnin produced photographs of the Rolla brothers. With these he scored a success. The *patron* and two waiters recognized Maurice Rolla at once and had seen the swarthy, short client with Maurice Rolla on two or three occasions, including the Saturday evening some hours before the bank-robbery.

"Also, monsieur," said the waiter. "There was a Chinaman with them once. Not that night; but two or three nights before then."

"Ah. A Chinaman, eh? Can you describe him?"

The waiter could not—except for the rather vague statement that the man "looked like a sailor." The waiter could not be sure the man was not Japanese, or Malay, or something un-Chinese: but, somehow, he had decided upon China as this nautical-looking man's place of origin. Only the one waiter had seen the Oriental, and then merely once. A great deal was obscure and subject to discussion and disagreement. Nevertheless Saturnin left the Café du Théâtre pretty well content with his morning's work.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SOMEONE HAD BLUNDERED

"There is another world for the expiation of guilt; but the wages of folly are payable here below."—LORD ACTON.

GUY LORRAIN sank into a seat at the side of Saturnin Dax's desk. The young man was, as usual, smartly dressed, with a button hole in his fur-collared overcoat, and his fair hair sleeked down and faintly odorous. But his face showed considerable signs of strain; his eyes seemed somehow out of focus, and his hand trembled as he took out his cigarette-case and asked permission to smoke.

"By all means—please," said Saturnin.

He watched his visitor light a Russian cigarette and puff at it nervously. For a moment or two Guy Lorrain smoked in silence, then he burst out in his high-pitched voice:

"Commissaire, I am almost beside myself! A terrible thing has happened. I have been a fool. Yes, without doubt, I have been a fool. But, what would you? The position is impossible. Impossible, and incredible. My poor father. I tremble for his safety—for his very life. Commissaire!"

Saturnin took a fresh packet of cigarettes from a drawer.

"You have had further demands from the kidnappers, monsieur?" he asked.

"Yes, yes."

Guy Lorrain passed one hand over his exceptionally high forehead.

"I suppose I am incoherent. I scarcely know what I am doing or saying. I had a second demand—yes. Something went wrong, the first time. There was blundering—somewhere, on someone's part . . . But, regard!"

From a pocket he took out a letter, type-addressed in its unsealed envelope, and handed it to Saturnin.

"Read this, monsieur. A second letter from my poor father."

"Typed, monsieur?"

"This is a copy, Commissaire. I destroyed the original."

Saturnin grunted. He had opened his packet of cigarettes and he lit one before he took out the letter and read:

My dear son,

You went to the police. My captors now demand 250,000 francs. For the love of God no more tricks! Do, tomorrow, just what you were instructed to do last time, and in every particular. Destroy this letter, at noon, tomorrow in the Place de l'Opera; go, as you went before, to the auberge between St. Remi and Fourche, and act as you did before, but without a word to the police.

My life is in your hands.

Edouard Lorrain.

"I received the letter—the original—the night before last," said Guy Lorrain. "It was in my father's handwriting, but showed signs of nervousness and distress. *Seigneur Dieu!* What he must have suffered! The letter was posted in the second *arrondissement* as before. I . . . I did not know what to do."

"But you carried out the given instructions, monsieur, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes. What would you?"

The banker dropped his short Russian cigarette with its cardboard tubing into an ash-tray. With shaking fingers he lit another.

"Evidently these criminals are cunning and resourceful. Every move is watched. Impossible for one to lay a trap without their knowing it. I do not blame you, Commissaire. It must be difficult, if not impossible. The long stretch of lonely road selected by the criminals. The visit to the auberge so late at night. No doubt these animals have studied the terrain. It is hopeless to get within ten kilometres of their rendez-vous without their knowing. Certainly one cannot blame the police."

"You are generous, monsieur. So you decided to carry out instructions and to work alone? And you did so, last night? And they tricked you?"

"Yes! Yes, that is so. At noon on the Place de l'Opera I burned their letter. I saw no suspicious person observing me, but, of course, in such a public place there are a thousand points of vantage—windows, doorways, vehicles and so forth—from which one could be watched unobserved. Later, that night, I again hired a car and drove to the auberge *Au Marin d'eau douce*. Once more I spent half an hour at the auberge, alone with the proprietor with whom I took a couple of glasses of *fine champagne*. He, I feel sure, is an honest type. Afterwards, I left the auberge and set out to walk along that deserted stretch of road. *Seigneur Dieu!* It was cold and windy, and I was altogether in a state! My mind was preoccupied with a terrible apprehension regarding my father. Thus I was rather taken by surprise by what occurred. For a big, open car came swiftly round a corner, and halted abruptly beside me. Lights flashed in my eyes, and, after the complete blackness, of the night, I was dazzled. Vaguely, I saw four figures in the automobile. Three had helmets, and goggles, I think. A fourth had, it seemed, a great beard, like my father's. A voice said to me, 'You have the money?' It was a harsh, rough voice, speaking in English, but I think with an American accent."

"You know English, monsieur? You are familiar with these differences of accent you mention?"

"I think so, Commissaire. Though of course, an American accent could easily be assumed, and in a way to deceive me. Yes, that did not occur to me before. All I can be certain of is that this spokesman used English. 'Come close,' he said. 'No tricks, remember. Hand over the money.' Then, as I advanced to the

automobile, this man spoke over his shoulder to his companions, saying, 'Let the old fellow out.' Ah, but it was cunning! I saw what looked like an old man, bearded and muffled up in a scarf and overcoat, preparing to alight from the open car. I thought it was my poor father. Now, Heaven alone knows whether it was he or not. For the spokesman of the gang, snatched the envelope from my hand and glanced at the notes under a light from the dashboard. 'Okay, boys,' he cried. And the next moment the powerful car leaped forward. The bearded figure fell, or was pulled back to the seat again. In a flash I was left there, on that deserted road, tricked, helpless and half mad with fury and despair. The sound of the car and the lights on the hedgerows grew fainter, and I was alone—stunned. After that I scarcely know what happened. How I got to Fourche. How I returned, late as it was, to Paris. For some time I walked in the wake of the vanishing car, hoping against hope, that the criminals might after all liberate my poor father, that I should find him, safe and well on the dark road . . . But I had been tricked completely."

Guy Lorrain groaned in uncontrolled despair and beat his forehead with his clenched fist.

Saturnin rose, walked over to his stove and poked up the fire.

"You did not notice the number of the car, monsieur? Or its make and style?"

"I noticed scarcely anything, Commissaire. It came on me so suddenly. It left me stunned. It was a low, rakish, open car. Very speedy, I should think. But I was not in a condition to observe and note things calmly."

"Evidently."

Saturnin went back to his desk and lowered himself with a grunt into his chair.

"And what is your theory regarding this affair?"

"My theory? I don't quite. . . .?"

"You have, monsieur, some notion I presume as to why kidnapers should behave in this manner? In this country the crime of kidnapping has been happily rare. But one imagines that, as a rule, such bandits demand a ransom, and, getting it, release their captive. Otherwise, one may ask, why should anyone pay ransom at all? You see the point?"

"Yes, yes."

Guy Lorrain lit his fourth cigarette. Then he made a helpless gesture with his long, white hands.

"I am completely baffled, monsieur. I cannot explain the conduct of these criminals. Certainly it is odd. One reason why I was tricked so easily was that I anticipated no such treachery."

"Evidently. You were not armed, monsieur?"

"No. Plainly it would be of little use going out to a lonely rendez-vous to meet a gang of dangerous criminals with a revolver in one's pocket. Especially when the criminals hold one's father

as hostage. Besides, I possess no revolver, Commissaire. I am a man of peace. I must confess I am helpless in such grotesque circumstances as these. Quite helpless."

Saturnin nodded sympathetically.

"Then you have no theory likely to explain the behaviour of these kidnappers? No idea occurs to you as to why they act in a way likely to—what shall we say?—spoil the market?"

"No," said Guy Lorrain. "No. I. . . ."

He broke off and suddenly stared at Saturnin in horror.

"*Seigneur Dieu!* Do you think . . . you don't imagine my poor father is no more? That he died in the hands of these apaches? But that is dreadful. Dreadful!"

"Come," said Saturnin. "It is not necessary to believe that. It is a possible theory, but there are others. Some trickery among the gangsters themselves. One lot tricking another lot. Or merely a desire to try and obtain two ransoms."

"Yes, yes. That is probably the explanation. They are crafty and unscrupulous. They want a second sum. . . ."

"In which case we shall hear from them again, monsieur. And the next time we shall make better plans. There will be no blundering, I assure you. And you must come to us at once. Trust to our experience and our organised powers, which I assure you are considerable."

The Commissaire spoke soothingly, and Guy Lorrain's distress seemed to diminish so that he grew far more assured.

"Certainly. I must come to you, Commissaire. I have been a fool. I see that now. But I can learn from experience, and I shall not make the same mistake again."

Saturnin grunted.

From a drawer in his desk he took two photographs. They represented Francois Jesick, full-face and in profile.

"Do you, by chance, recognize this man, monsieur? Look closely, for he sometimes alters his appearance in one way and another. Look at the eyes and ears and the general shape of the head and jaws. . . ."

One of the photographs was framed and Guy Lorrain took it in his hands and looked closely. Both likenesses he examined for some little time, but finally he shook his head.

"No Commissaire. To the best of my belief I have never set eyes on this individual."

Saturnin sighed.

"A pity," he said. "But I was afraid you would tell me that."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: CAT AND MOUSE

"The seizure of a criminal may be justified by certain arguments as to the health of society and the preservation of property, but no person wishes under any circumstances to hale a wise person to prison."—JAMES STEPHENS.

IN the cell Saturnin Dax found a very annoyed and indignant prisoner. Francois Jesick started to his feet and let loose a flood of picturesquely phrased expostulation. He waved in one large hand a copy of *L'Intransigeant*, for he was allowed privileges, though "detained," and he wore his own clothes except for boot-laces, suspenders and cravat.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "What do you mean by this cat and mouse game. You *flics* think you can do what you like, but you'll soon find you can't. What am I supposed to be in for . . . ?"

There was a great deal more in the same vein, whilst Saturnin seated himself calmly on the chair the prisoner had vacated. When Jesick paused at last, more for want of breath than for lack of emotional urge, the Commissaire spoke sadly.

"You're the kind of fellow that breaks my heart, Jesick," he said. "You have got the fixed idea we want to persecute you. We don't. We want to forget you. Like most men, the police wish to get through their work with the least trouble to themselves. You're the sort that won't let us forget you. As soon as we take our eyes off you we find you up to your old tricks—or new ones."

Saturnin shook his head whilst the prisoner stared in baffled astonishment.

"Tricks . . . ?" said Jesick. "Who's been up to tricks? What the hell do you mean?"

Saturnin continued to shake his head almost mournfully.

"When you told me you were not in with the gang that broke into the Lorrain-Prad Bank, I believed you. I'm still a mug! A few days after we let you out, you pull this affair. Kidnapping! *Sacrebleu!* Busting a safe is a school-boy prank in comparison. I'm not sure I don't regard straight-forward shooting and murder as better than kidnapping an old man."

"Kidnapping an old man . . . ?"

Jesick, who had been pacing the floor like a caged hyena, turned quickly, his large, pasty-white face quite startled.

"What do you mean? Who told you . . . ? Are you talking about the kidnapping of Edouard Lorrain? Listen, Commissaire. I know nothing about that. I am for nothing in the affair. I swear it, on the sacred head of my mother."

Saturnin sighed.

"I wish I could believe you, Jesick. But the English chauffeur

is now able to make a statement—though by no means out of danger yet. He was held up in the Bois by a motor-cyclist. His employer called for help, but the motor-cyclist gripped Williams, the chauffeur, by the throat, whilst someone, who had opened the door of the car, knocked out Williams with a blow on the back of the head."

"Well . . . ?"

Jesick bit the nails of one hand, almost in a frenzy.

"What the hell has all that to do with me? I'm for nothing in all that. Nothing!"

"Williams' description of this motor-cyclist would cover you pretty well, Jesick. The man wore a leather helmet and goggles, nevertheless . . ."

"Hell! I had nothing to do with it. I've been nowhere near the Bois since I saw you last. I've got a room in an hotel, in the Rue Nollet, if you want to know. As a matter of fact I haven't been outside the quarter."

"I wish I could believe you, Jesick."

"You can. Anyway, you've got nothing on me. A chauffeur sees a man in a helmet and goggles, and at night. What sort of description can you get out of that? It wasn't me. You can't hold me on that sort of stuff. You got to let me out of here."

Saturnin shook his head.

"There's the coincidence, Jesick. I fear it's a little too much to swallow. Your friends make an attempt on the Lorraine-Prad Bank. They are shot. Shortly afterwards the head partner of the Bank is dragged from his car in the Bois and taken off to be held for ransom. Isn't it obvious that pals of Maurice and Jean Rolla want revenge? Isn't it plain that, having failed at the bank, the rest of the gang want to recoup by kidnapping the banker? And you were one of the gang, Jesick. But for your chance arrest you'd have been with the Rollas that night. You used to have a motor-bike and no doubt you have one now. You . . ."

"Listen, Commissaire, you got this all wrong. I swear I'm for nothing in this affair. I wasn't in the bank job, was I? What do I want, then, with revenge, and kidnapping?"

"Who does then? Only by accident were you out of the job with the Rollas. They were pals of yours."

"Not such pals as that. They were shot by the night-watchman, *hein*? I read all about it in the newspaper files—in *L'Intran*. Some fellow got away. With a lot of stuff. What do I . . . ?"

"Who is he, Jesick?"

Saturnin had risen quickly. He caught the other by the lapel of his coat, watching every fleeting expression on the cunning, brutal face.

"This short, dark man? Swarthy complexion, and pock-marked? A Basque or Spaniard, eh? Dresses well, usually in dark clothes. Goes about sometimes with a Chinese confederate—a sailor. Who is he?"

Francois Jesick's naturally white face became even paler. A look of fear came into his eyes, which were rapidly veiled. In a quick sequence the man displayed surprise, consternation and fear. Then there was a look of calculation, followed by a stupid, obstinate resolve.

"I don't know . . . I don't know anything of what you are talking about."

Saturnin grunted.

"That's a pity."

He turned towards the door whilst Jesick watched sullenly.

"I know nothing. You can't keep me here. I want a lawyer. Listen. You can't hold a man . . ."

"We shan't hold you, Jesick. You will be released at once."

Saturnin proceeded thoughtfully to his office. There he called for a telephone number and was soon speaking to the editorial department of the newspaper, *Flair*. The Commissaire asked for a newspaper man named Gabriel Wall, and got him.

"Hullo, Commissaire. Got some dope for me?" said the young journalist.

"Just a news item," said Saturnin. "Nothing very much, but it may interest your readers. It concerns the Lorrain kidnapping affair. We've made an arrest."

"Really. Who?"

"A man named Francois Jesick. A crook with a bad record. But we shall have to release him for want of evidence."

"Oh."

The journalist's voice registered considerable disappointment.

"Not enough evidence, eh? You're letting him go?"

"Yes. That's the news item, and you will be the first to get it, Wall."

"That's great. It'll be a wonderful scoop—perhaps! You're not making use of me, by any chance, Commissaire?"

"Now, now!" said Saturnin. "I'm surprised at you! Would I do a thing like that?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: IMAGINATION AND THEORY.

"One of his pleasures was the choosing of a finely ordered meal, not merely in the suspect service of hospitality, but for honest purpose of private enjoyment."—ERIC LINKLATER.

NOT a bowshot from the Quai des Orfèvres is a little restaurant run by the Russian ex-chef of a Russian ex-archduke, and here Saturnin Dax often goes for the nourishment his large frame demands. Felix Norman found his superior officer discussing coffee, a special green vodka, and the piano music of Rimski Korsakov, with the hirsute proprietor. This worthy greeted Felix and soon bowed himself away from the table. The Brigadier had

ordered coffee, declined anything stronger, and now drew out his tobacco-pouch and pseudo-English calabash.

"You have lunched?" said Saturnin.

Felix nodded.

"I had a sandwich at the automatic bar," he said. The Commissaire shuddered and hastily sipped vodka.

"My poor boy! My poor France! Where will it all end?"

He shook his head gloomily and pulled a cigarette from a yellow packet with his lips.

"I have been working," said Felix, virtuously. "And I have one or two things to report. First of all, the English chauffeur, Bert Williams, is out of danger, though by no means fit to leave hospital. Secondly, at the Lido Club, I can find no evidence that Stephane Prad gambled heavily; in fact it appears unlikely. He went there, chiefly, to use the swimming-pool, which is excellent—I often use it myself."

"Good!" Saturnin grunted.

"Thirdly," said Felix. "All attempts to trace a person 'phoning from the Chateau de Madrid to Edouard Lorrain in the Avenue Hoche have failed. It looks as though the kidnappers 'phoned from some other place—probably dialing from a call-box. That was to be expected, eh?"

"Evidently," agreed Saturnin. "But crooks are usually a queer mixture of craft and foolishness. They plan very carefully a faked suicide. Then they stick a note too high on the door and use the wrong ink. Sometimes they are over-cunning; sometimes they get sublimely careless, especially if they use drugs, as a lot of 'em do, today."

Felix nodded.

"Well, I don't think we've overlooked the obvious. Flach has been covering the clerks at the Lorrain-Prad Bank, particularly those who might have got at the late Stephane Prad's keys. It looks as though all these clerks are decent fellows, quite innocent of crime. They are pretty well selected, you know. The Bank is considered a good, old-fashioned concern, where employees are well treated, and there's competition to get a job there. Also these private banks employ agents of their own, to watch the night cabarets, the race-tracks and so on, and if clerks are seen playing the millionaire, then things are looked into . . ."

"Just so. This is not likely to be an affair of bank-clerk's defalcations," said Saturnin. "However, one of them might be concerned. The Bank books will be audited towards the end of the year, and, if we haven't cleared things up, I'll get a man who will help with the auditors . . ."

The Commissaire finished his vodka and brushed his moustache.

"What about our old friend, Francois Jesick?" he asked.

"He's gone back to a simple existence," said Felix. "Still at the same hotel, and keeping in the Rue de Clichy neighbourhood. Every evening he goes to the Café du Théâtre."

"And the Select Cinema ?" said Saturnin.

"Not so frequently. He has now taken up crossword puzzles. Sits in the café, most nights, with *L'Intran* and a dictionary. An innocent, and even a pathetic sight."

Saturnin grunted.

"The animal knows who got out of the bank-cellar. This swarthy, Spanish-looking fellow. We don't seem to have him on our records, that's the worst of it. And there's a Chinaman or Jap, also unknown. Possibly sea-faring."

"Do you think they kidnapped Edouard Lorrain ?" asked Felix. "I think the son might be in that. A man who smarms his hair down and wears a lilac tie is capable of anything."

"You're jealous," said Saturnin. "Why should Guy Lorrain kidnap his father, even though his clothes are so beautiful ?"

"I don't say the son agreed originally to the father's kidnapping. But I do suggest it was Guy Lorrain, and not Stephane Prad, who worked hand in glove with the bank-robbers, after which the tailor's dummy has to acquiesce in anything the crooks demand."

"Motive ?"

"Guy Lorrain is passionately in love with Prad's wife and wants Prad out of the way. Incidentally, the fair Estelle is a Catholic and devout ; she would object to divorce. In planning the ironing out of his business associate Guy comes in contact with a desperate gang of crooks. Guy, being hard up, thinks, why not pay the crooks for bumping Prad by allowing them to rob the bank ? That's his preliminary notion. Then Guy's scheme works up to a neat two birds with one stone job. Prad out of the way, and, the crooks who kill him paid with bank cash. And if there's any suspicion of an inside job, because of the business with the keys, then suspicion must be put on to the deceased Prad. The tailor's dummy gets the woman he wants, plus her fortune, and pays his accomplices with a bank-robbery, which the insurance company will make good. I call it neat, and if the night-watchman had not come on the scene all would have been well. But, the Rollas being shot, the fellows that get away want revenge. So they kidnap old Lorrain and demand ransom, knowing that the son can do nothing about it, even if they ask for the cash twice over."

"What an imagination !"

Saturnin sipped coffee and grimaced to find it cold.

"And Chartrettes ? Where does he come in ?"

"That's easy. It was really Guy hired Chartrettes, to get a case against Prad which would help Guy to win Estelle. Whilst on the job, and hanging round the villa of St. Remi, Chartrettes sees some crooks, hired by Guy Lorrain, acting suspiciously. Or else Chartrettes sees Guy Lorrain himself . . . That's it ! Depend upon it. Guy went in to dope the coffee, of course ; and later, to asphyxiate his victims. He did the job himself, and he was seen, going in or out, by Chartrettes."

Saturnin looked impressed.

"That could be . . ."

"Of course!"

The Brigadier's pink and white face flushed with triumph.

"And Chartrettes is now blackmailing Guy Lorrain. This morning Chartrettes went into the Lorrain-Prad Bank and presented a cheque and a note. The bank clerk looked at the cheque, then at the note, and then he went into the director's offices. He came out and said Monsieur Guy Lorrain was out, but that Monsieur Neveux would come in a few moments. Chartrettes sat on a bench, looking quite pleased with himself, and lighting a cigarette. Presently Paul Neveux, the late manager, promoted director, appeared with an envelope in his hands. After an exchange of a few words, in a distant corner, Chartrettes got his envelope and went off with a grin. Pellegrin was tailing Chartrettes at the time. He couldn't get near enough to hear what Chartrettes said to Neveux, and, of course, we don't know the contents of that note. But, surely, the whole thing means blackmail? Actually Guy Lorrain was in the office all the time."

Saturnin brushed his moustache slowly, to left and right.

"Did Pellegrin try the clerk who took the note?"

"Yes. Lunched a little later, at the next table to him. Got into conversation, stood a drink, and so forth. Nothing doing. The clerk knew nothing, or else he got suspicious and wouldn't talk."

Felix Norman blew out an immense cloud of tobacco smoke and became elaborately careless.

"By the way, Estelle Prad is going to take a house in the Avenue Kleber."

"A house? A private hotel?"

"Yes. A whole house to herself," said Felix. He grinned. "Perhaps an *appartement* wouldn't do, eh? Too much concierge, to overlook one's affairs and visitors—with lilac ties. By the way, Guy Lorrain lives nearby; in the Rue Copernic. His lady-love has plenty of money and is doing things in style. She was advertising for a woman-companion, English or English-speaking. So I sent a friend of mine after the job."

"Ah!"

Saturnin looked quickly at the younger man's carefully casual expression.

"Any luck?"

"My friend has got the job. She is a Miss Grace Talbot. A member of the Entente Sporting Club. Used to be a fine skater, but had a nasty accident. Now she devotes herself to secretarial duties and the social side of our club activities. A very capable woman. Good old family—Catholic—the best references. About fifty. Hair touched up, and still has a hopeful eye. An excellent companion she'll make, and she won't mind keeping me posted as to happenings in the Avenue Kleber. May be useful, eh?"

"Evidently. Good boy! Nothing like having a friend in the

enemy's camp, as it were. Especially one who will work as a labour of love."

He glanced maliciously at Felix's red, expostulating face; then the Commissaire clapped his hands, with Oriental imperiousness, summoning the *garçon* and the bill.

"All the same," said Felix. "Joking apart. What do you think of my theory? Our friend Guy is not happy. If ever I saw a fellow with a weight on his mind, Guy Lorrain is one. It's my opinion some gang has got a hold on Guy, and they kidnapped his father. Guy knows a lot more than he tells, what?"

Saturnin nodded gravely.

"I think you may be right. But we must get more facts. I am wondering, for example, whether old Lorrain is still alive."

The waiter came, and departed with a hundred-franc note and the bill on a plate.

Felix stared, and did not speak until the waiter was out of earshot.

"*Sapristi!* You think Edouard Lorrain is dead? What makes you think that?"

Saturnin shrugged.

"An obvious possibility, surely? Anyhow, it is a notion that must be taken into account."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE . . . ?

"He was not drunk, but more optimistic than the state of society warrants."

—ARNOLD BENNETT

It was nearly one in the morning. Francois Jesick sat in the Café du Théâtre, and he sat alone, eyed from time to time by drowsy waiters and by the *patron* who was checking accounts in the *caisse*. Jesick sat bolt upright, and with a certain superficial air of correctness, if not of austerity. On his large head was a bowler hat, slightly dented, and, in the French style, rather too small. He wore a green overcoat and a grey silk muffler, but both were loosened. Not far from his hand, but long since abandoned, was a copy of *L'Intransigeant*, folded at the cross-word puzzle, and also a dictionary. Between Jesick's pale, bloodless lips was a cheap cigar, quite extinguished. Immediately before him was a glass of Pernod set in a little saucer, marked plainly, 4 francs 50 centimes. There was on the table a pile of such saucers, all with their black ciphers: 4frs. 50c: a little tower or cenotaph raised to the memory of Francois Jesick's thirst, more or less departed, and to a certain mood of nostalgic loneliness rapidly approaching bitterness and misanthropy, a mood that had lain heavily upon Jesick's spirit for some five hours previously, and a weariness of the flesh which seemed to extend, deepen and intensify as the pale amber flood of Pernod was conveyed in a trickling, opalescent stream down his smoke-dried throat.

It was, Jesick considered, an empty and deceitful world. It was even an actively treacherous world, filled with gins, and traps, and unsuspected pitfalls; a world where even a man's pet liquor could betray him, and instead of bestowing the kindly gift of oblivion, produce only a keener sense of impotence, despair and frustration.

Jesick suddenly brought a large hand crashing down upon the table.

"The bourgeoisie . . . !" he said, loudly, though vaguely. A waiter, who had been almost asleep in a chair, rose with a start and went over to the client. The waiter struck a match. Despite the severe handicap of Jesick's would-be collaborating movements, the waiter succeeded in setting fire to the cigar which flared for a moment with a surprising, greeny-blue flame, like the corposant luminosity of St. Elmo seen on a murky night at sea.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Jesick gravely, and he sucked powerfully at the cigar.

The *patron* at the cash-desk coughed and looked with significance at his waiter. The waiter lifted the half-filled glass of Pernod from its saucer and then counted all the saucers.

"Forty francs and fifty centimes, monsieur," he announced. Jesick laid back his overcoat and muffler, undid a coat and an affair of brown wool, unfastened the top buttons of a waistcoat and fumbled in a special pocket lining. It was quite a lengthy business, rather resembling a strip-tease act, though less stimulating. The waiter waited, as was his office, and was finally rewarded when the client produced a fifty franc note, shook it violently as though gold-dust might be adhering, and then passed it over.

"Be good enough to keep the change, monsieur," said Jesick.

"Thank you, monsieur."

The waiter watched whilst the client dressed again and rose stiffly to his feet.

"The bourgeoisie," said Jesick, looking rather aggressively from waiter to café-proprietor. "Stavisk . . . Stavisk . . . what's his name."

"Evidently, monsieur," said the *patron*, politely.

"Monsieur's dictionary and journal," said the waiter.

"What . . . ? Ah, thank you. Good night, messieurs."

Jesick folded the newspaper and pocketed it; he tucked the dictionary under his arm and swept off his dented bowler in a brilliant salute.

"*A demain, messieurs.*"

He went out into the night whilst the waiters, as though inspired by sudden frenzy, threw themselves upon the light, cane chairs and began to stack them on top of the marble tables. The proprietor extinguished most of the lights.

Outside, Jesick paused to buy some baked chestnuts from a vendor who was talking to a tall man with overcoat collar turned high. It was a cold, windy night with great lowering clouds

hanging above the silent house-tops, and rain kept off only by the force of the wind. A sickly moon floated amid the clouds and disappeared like a poor swimmer caught in a rough sea.

Jesick walked north, up the Rue de Clinchy, munching hot chestnuts taken from a paper bag. Somehow his mood had changed and bitterness was passing. In fact positive cheerfulness was breaking through and Pernod was beginning to act as Jesick expected that potent liquid to act. The world, after all, provided compensations for loneliness and depression. The wind was boisterous and fresh, yet it was not an unpleasant night. There was a charm about these silent streets in which one could now walk unimpeded by jostling crowds and with ears unaffected by roaring and clattering traffic. Late night had become the only time when a man could stroll at his ease in a city; the only time when a man could think peacefully, meditate, and possess himself. And the moon, too, emerging coyly to play tricks on the roof-tops and windows and to throw odd shadows across the pavements—this also had a tranquil charm. . . .

Jesick raised his voice aloud and sang.

Vous! Qu'avez vous fait de mon amour?

Qu'avez vous fai de mon bonheur,

Etrange femme . . . ?

These being the only words of the song he knew he repeated them several times. But he changed his tone, and experimented, sometimes attempting a profound bass and then pitching his voice as high as possible, trying to imitate a woman. He had turned off into a narrow street and the sound of his voice, muffled a little by chestnuts, struck at the wall and echoed back. Jesick laughed and began to make barking noises as he saw a cat scuttling before him.

Suddenly, in the middle of his frolic, he heard steps and low voices. There was something furtive and sinister in these sounds, and Jesick half-turned, in quick apprehension, towards the deep shadows around a *porte-cochere*. His alarm came too late to save him. Three men, vaguely seen in villainous caps and mufflers, fell upon Jesick and seized his person. As the victim let out a baffled roar, one of his assailants gripped his throat from behind. A dictionary fell, face upwards and open, on the *pavé*. A few chestnuts rolled and bounced amid the shifting feet.

"He's," cried Jesick, and, the next moment his muffler was tightening around his throat whilst skilful hands twisted and pulled upon it. A sickening fear clutched at Jesick's heart as he realized that he was *not* being robbed. No hands were searching his pockets. Fingers felt at his throat and squeezed, but they were vengeful rather than pilfering fingers: he was in the grip of deadly, silent enemies who meant to do him physical hurt: perhaps they meant to kill him?

Terror gave Jesick a fresh access of strength. Desperately he managed to loose the clutch at his throat, and he uttered a second

cry. And now his cry was answered. There came the sound of shouts and of a bicycle-bell ringing loudly. The grips and holds on Jesick's large frame were slackened and one of his assailants uttered a hoarse whispering warning. Jesick was tripped and overthrown. The attackers melted away as silently and swiftly as they had come, and two cyclist-police appeared.

"Hé. What's this?"

Jesick scrambled to his feet, clutching at his throat and trembling.

One of the *agents* came towards him carrying the dented bowler, rather more dented. His colleague, flashing a torch about, sighted the dictionary in the gutter.

"What's the trouble? Have you been robbed?"

"No," stammered Jesick. "No. You came just in time to save me from that." He was dead sober now. He thanked his rescuers, gave his name and address, and tried to give them some money, but they declined. One of the agents appeared at first rather suspicious of Jesick, but the dictionary had about it something disarming, and so had the remains of a packet of chestnuts. Jesick told how he had spent a quiet evening at the *Café du Théâtre*, and had been set upon as he walked to his hotel, nearby, in the *Rue Nollet*. The matter ended with the two policemen accompanying Jesick to the *Hotel d'Ivry*, wheeling their cycles beside him and conversing quite amiably. Having seen Jesick "home," and asked a question or two of the night porter, the *agents* went away, with a cheery good night for the man they had succoured.

But Jesick was feeling far from happy. As he undressed in the little brightly-lit bedroom he kept pausing and staring in front of him, with a collar or pair of braces hanging idly in his large hands. Nothing had been taken from his pockets. An old-fashioned silver watch reposed in a waist-coat pocket. A silver cigarette-case was on his hip and a stick-pin with a small diamond even remained in his tie, and Jesick had paid, though in unofficial, unorthodox fashion, eight hundred francs for that stick-pin. There was even a large sum of money in the inside lining-pocket of his waist-coat, and professional thieves would scarcely overlook such a thing.

In his green and grey striped pyjamas, with the coverlet of the bed turned down, Jesick hesitated; then, with an air of great purpose, he slipped on a dressing-gown. At the end of the room, beside the windows, was a table covered with a shabby yellow cloth and holding ink and writing materials. Jesick sat at this table, drew paper towards him and bit thoughtfully upon his pen.

For the next forty minutes Jesick worked hard and engaged in a kind of mental concentration with which he was unfamiliar and to which he was instinctively antagonistic. However, at the end of this time, after covering and destroying many sheets of paper, he at last concocted an announcement which seemed to him adequate to his purpose, and, in fact, distinctly clever. He made a fair transcription of the message and blotted it. From his over-

coat pocket he took his copy of *L'Intransigeant* and looked up the address of their advertising department. This done, Jesick addressed an envelope, then he extinguished the lights and got into bed.

So it was that Commissioner Saturnin Dax looking over the newspapers stopped at the personal column of *L'Intransigeant* and grunted with satisfaction. He read as follows:— *F. J. to L. M. Uncle's departure nothing to do with me. Am under doctor's care but wish to see you. Urgent.*"

Saturnin read this with satisfaction and cut it out of the journal. In his office he turned to a page in an ever-growing, bulky dossier. Here there was written a brief description of a man, Spaniard or Basque, who dressed in good, dark clothes, had a swarthy, pock-mark complexion, was of short stature, and carried a leathern walking-stick. To his description Saturnin added: initials *L.M.*

CHAPTER NINETEEN: MACABRE

"Man is a wild beast, carnivorous by nature, and delighting in blood."—TAINÉ.

THE telephone on Saturnin Dax's desk emitted a somewhat ambiguous sound and then a voice informed him Monsieur Paul Neveux was below and urgently desired an interview. Two minutes later an *agent* knocked on the door and the director of the Lorraine-Prad Bank entered.

It was a cold morning and Paul Neveux appeared cold. But it seemed to Saturnin that this frigidity on the part of the banker was not merely physical. It went perhaps rather deeper, and penetrated to hidden recesses of what are now called the "psyche," and which Victorians called the "soul" or "heart" and Elizabethans "the liver." Paul Neveux was young for the position he had won for himself. Of middle height and square-built, he looked barely forty, despite his frosty gravity. He wore a well-cut, dark coat and carried gloves and a bowler hat. His face was clean-shaven, his chin square and dark like that of a man who particularly needs the daily razor. The mouth was unusually small, with thin pale lips that easily shut tight; a mouth at once prim and censorious yet calculating. The eyes, dark and bright but lacking in softness and depth, looked shrewdly and directly at Saturnin as the visitor uttered a conventional greeting.

"Please be seated, monsieur."

Saturnin put away some papers in a drawer. With a murmur of thanks Neveux sat down and placed his hat and gloves on a corner of the large desk. It struck Saturnin that his visitor was a changed man, differing from the perfect bank-manager whom the Commissaire had met a few weeks previously. Neveux sat

stiffly in his chair, his lips pursed, his eyes thoughtful, as though he were mentally preparing some complicated statement. The pale face was curiously still. Somehow Saturnin found himself recalling the phrase old Edouard Lorrain had quoted from Stephane Prad: "One can succeed in business only by failing in life." The paradox seemed applicable to this young man.

"I have come, Commissaire, on behalf of Monsieur Guy Lorraine," said Neveux. "And also, of course, on the business of the Bank."

"Yes? Fresh developments?"

Saturnin offered a yellow packet of cigarettes which his visitor declined. "Thank you, but I don't smoke. Certainly there have been developments. This kidnapping gang have recently made a fresh demand, and one that we should be quite unable, in any circumstances to meet. Their demand was for a million francs."

"Aha! The price goes up. Despite the ill-faith these animals recently displayed?" Saturnin cocked a questioning eye, whilst his lips pulled a cigarette from a packet.

"Monsieur Guy Lorrain would be quite unable to lay his hands upon so large a sum, Commissaire. His private fortune is not great, whilst my own personal means are, frankly, very modest. We are the custodians of large sums—of other people's money. The fact scarcely assists us in finding a million, immediately, and for personal needs."

"A loan?" suggested Saturnin.

A faint spot of colour showed in each of Neveux's pale cheeks.

"Of course a loan could have been raised, no doubt. But would it have been justified? I mean justified, apart from the legal aspects and one's duties as an honest citizen? It seems no faith could be placed in the word of these people—as one might well expect with such desperate criminals. Monsieur Guy was in a terrible position; he felt . . ."

"One moment. Pardon! You speak in the past tense. Do you mean a certain peremptory demand has been made and refused?"

"Made, and ignored, Commissaire. Though ignored is scarcely the right word. My partner, Monsieur Guy, worried himself into a state bordering upon nervous prostration. He could not decide upon any course of action, and he did not confide in me. I wish, if possible, to represent to you the terrible state of his feelings; the dreadful condition of helplessness and anguished indecision which finally reduced him to a state very near collapse. He has never been strong. He is now in the care of Doctor Marcel Allard, the family physician, a man whom you probably know, if only by repute."

Paul Neveux hesitated for a moment and then looked directly at the Commissaire.

"I fear my partner flew to drugs, finally, for relief from what he found an intolerable strain. For my part I have only learned these

facts this morning. Perhaps Guy would have found relief had he discussed matters with me, earlier."

Saturnin nodded gravely.

"Evidently a desperate position. How to find such a large sum, and, even if one found it, would it achieve the only result that mattered? Yes, yes, very difficult."

"*N'est-ce-pas*, Commissaire? Here is the letter written, indubitably, by Monsieur Edouard. The same cheap notepaper, you will observe. Posted, as before, in the second *arrondissement*."

Neveux took a letter from his breast pocket and handed it to the Commissaire. The envelope was addressed, in what looked like Edouard Lorrain's handwriting, to his son at the Bank. The writing, however, was no longer bold and firm; it appeared shaky, like the tremblingly-formed characters of a man very old, or seriously ill. The letter inside showed these straggling, uneven characteristics yet more decidedly. Saturnin took note of a week-old date, and then read:

My dear boy,

My captors now insist on a million francs. It must be paid tomorrow, and you must act just as you did before. This time, I shall be released. I am ill, my dear boy, and you are my sole hope. For the love of God do not fail me.

E. L.

The initials that made up the signature were almost illegible scrawl. Saturnin examined the letter very carefully, handling the sheet of dirty, common paper most gingerly with a pair of light tweezers. From his desk he took Edouard Lorrain's former letter and compared the handwriting.

"To me there is not the slightest doubt," said Neveux. "This is the handwriting of Monsieur Edouard. Despite the terribly significant irregularities, I am sure I could not be mistaken. I have seen too much of his writing in the last twenty years. Perhaps his fingerprints are on the paper, too, Commissaire. I note you are taking precautions, doubtless with such prints in your mind. For my part, I thought of that, and used gloves when I examined it—though I doubt if Guy Lorrain considered taking precautions."

Saturnin grunted.

"So this appeal, or demand, came to Guy Lorrain a week ago. Its effect was to drive him into a conflicted state of irresolution and great agitation, followed by nervous collapse—is that it?"

"Precisely, Commissaire."

"And the result? Has there been one? I fancy you have called here to speak of more than mere threats, monsieur?"

Saturnin's voice was grim, and Neveux's cold face hardened as he nodded and thrust a hand into his overcoat pocket.

"You are right, Commissaire. I wish to relate things in orderly sequence and to give you the facts as they became known to me. Guy Lorrain has for the last four days been living at Dr. Marcel

Allard's house, in Passy, where the doctor runs a clinic and sometimes instals certain patients in order to keep them under his personal care. I have made a practice of calling, every morning, on my partner. . . You will comprehend that my position at the Bank has become one of considerable delicacy and difficulty, and I do not wish to act alone, entirely on my own responsibility any more than I can help. So I have discussed with Guy Lorrain all possible Bank business. I have taken to him any letters, or matters of importance, including, of course, his own private mail. And, this morning, this arrived! "

Paul Neveux's hand came from his overcoat pocket. He pulled out a small, square package loosely contained in brown paper. On the desk he placed the package, at the same time removing the paper and revealing a cigarette tin.

"There, Commissaire. Look for yourself! "

Saturnin opened the tin, slowly. It was a box made to contain fifty, Turmac cigarettes. But, inside, was a large wad of cotton-wool, stained a rusty, reddish-brown, and, on top of the wool, was a severed finger. It was the little finger from a left hand, and upon it was a cameo ring. Lying beside this gruesome relic was a piece of paper, on which were printed, in English and in block-capitals, the words:

"You asked for it. Now watch the river."

Saturnin grunted. His eyes met those of Paul Neveux.

"You understand English, Monsieur? "

"Yes, I can read it. Commissaire. Guy, too, poor fellow. I left him prostrate. I had not, of course, the faintest idea what a bombshell I was carrying to him. 'Watch the river.' That suggests, does it not, that these apaches will throw the body of their victim into the river? "

"It suggests that. You are convinced that this severed finger belonged to Edouard Lorrain? "

Neveux looked surprised.

"But certainly, Commissaire. One recognizes it. And there is the ring, which, owing to his rheumatism, poor Monsieur Edouard could hardly remove from his finger. See how it is embedded in the flesh. No, I have no doubt; nor has Guy; nor Dr. Allard to whom I showed it. He, by the way, considers that the finger was probably removed before death. He considers the quantity of blood which flowed there, on the wool, strongly indicates such a thing. But I . . . I have my doubts."

"Ah, yes? "

Saturnin lit a fresh cigarette, his eyes veiled as he considered the other.

"Yes, Commissaire. I ask myself these questions: Why should kidnappers deliberately murder their victim? Is it not killing the goose that may well lay golden eggs? And why did these criminals trick Guy some time ago, and take from him 250,000 francs? For me there is only one answer. Poor old Monsieur Edouard Lorrain

died at their hands and they have since done what they could to profit financially by means of American bluff."

"American bluff? You think these criminals are Americans, monsieur?"

"Or their imitators, Commissaire."

Neveux shrugged.

"In any case they tricked poor Guy and they thought they might do it again. But they made mistakes. They asked too great a sum. They drove him to despair, to drugs, and into nervous prostration."

"And then they sever a finger from their captive—alive or dead—and send it to the son? Why, monsieur? You have a theory?"

"Sheer malice, monsieur, born of baffled greed and anger. Class-hatred and malice. There is abroad, to-day, a spirit of revolt and anarchy. We bankers come across it rather frequently. The criminal is no longer a straightforward burglar or pickpocket. No, he mixes politics with his crime, and declares himself a communist, bolshevist, rebel against capitalism—what you will. Do you not agree, Commissaire?"

"Possibly. Though I doubt whether there is anything new in the criminal trying to excuse and justify his crimes by claiming to avenge himself against the injustice of society."

"No, no. Evidently you comprehend these things better than me. But I feel that people are becoming more ruthless, in every walk of life, today. So I am not amazed at this revolting package addressed to poor Guy. Yet I do not think his father was alive when the finger was severed. I have told Guy this. It may comfort him a little. The fact is, Monsieur Edouard was, medically speaking, a man under sentence of death."

"Ah! Truly?"

"Yes, Commissaire. He concealed the facts from his son, for whom he had the greatest regard and affection. But, in the circumstances, I thought it best to tell Guy the truth now. Monsieur Edouard, as a matter of business precaution, confided in me. He suffered from hypertension—heightened blood-pressure, you know. The position was that, whilst he might live for several years, he might also be taken off, quite suddenly. Dr. Marcel Allard is aware of this. In fact, Monsieur Edouard demanded and obtained the truth from Dr. Allard himself. Depend upon it, some sudden shock or intense excitement proved too much for poor Monsieur Edouard. I really doubt whether he could go through the experience of kidnapping and so on without a fatality."

Saturnin drew a pad of paper towards him and made a brief shorthand note.

"I expect we shall be able to prove whether the finger belonged to Edouard Lorrain, or no. As to whether it was severed before or after death, we shall submit the matter to experts, whereupon half will declare one way and half declare the other. That is the manner of experts."

Saturnin took from a drawer in his desk a photograph mounted

in what appeared rather an unnecessary, large frame. The frame was of some cheap, shining metal. The picture represented Francois Jesick, in his habit as he lived.

"Do you, by any chance, recognize this man, monsieur?"

Paul Neveux took the photograph in his hands, turning it so as to catch all the available light.

"No, I don't think so, Commissaire."

"Look carefully. He might take pains to change his appearance."

"I am certain I don't know this man. I have a good memory for faces."

Neveux put the picture down on Saturnin's desk.

"Is he suspected as being one of these kidnappers, Commissaire?"

"Naturally we are considering possible operators. Men with bad records, *n'est-ce-pas*? But kidnapping is not common in France. . . What would you? We follow up any clue, however slender, that presents itself. And, *à propos*, since you are here and we can talk confidentially—what do you think of the whole affair?"

"You mean the burglary at the Bank, and . . .?"

"Yes. That, and the suicide of Stephane Prad, and this kidnapping?"

Neveux shook his head and pursed up his small mouth.

"Are these affairs connected, Commissaire?"

"That is just what I ask myself, monsieur. What do you think? What does Monsieur Guy Lorrain think?"

"I have not discussed matters very much with him. To tell the truth, he is not . . . well he is not a strong man. I believe even as a child he was physically weak and inclined to timidity. Not the person, you comprehend, to face such shocking affairs as these, and to face them with balanced judgment and coolness."

"I see. But you have formed views? The burglary, no doubt, you discussed fully with Monsieur Edouard?"

"We discussed it. The effects it would have—the insurance, our credit—and so forth. The burglary itself was surely a straightforward affair, Commissaire?"

"You think so? The steel grilled door of the vault was opened by a key which left no scratches on the lock. In other words, someone got access to the actual key, and used the actual key or a copy."

"Yes . . ."

Neveux's still face became more mask-like than ever. He appeared to hesitate.

"I think you were informed, Commissaire, that whereas Messieurs Edouard and Guy, and myself kept our keys carefully on a ring and a pocket chain, Monsieur Prad did not: in fact he was a little careless in this matter. . ."

"And other matters too, eh?"

"I fear so—yes. You comprehend that such . . . er . . . light-heartedness and easy-going behaviour, whilst charming in certain spheres and in ordinary walks of life, is a thoroughly bad thing in business, above all in banking. It undermines discipline perhaps. It

may even tempt otherwise honourable and trustworthy employees."

"Ah! You suspect one of your clerks? You think one of them may have got at Monsieur Prad's keys?"

"Well, one is reluctant. . . Nothing suspicious has come to light. So far as we know none of the securities stolen has yet been sold. There has been no such sale traced, *n'est-ce-pas*? And none of our employees has shown any sign of augmented income. . . They are young men of good family, and are carefully chosen, Commissaire. You will understand that, in such a case as this, one considers all the probabilities and even the slenderest possibilities. For that reason alone I . . ."

"Evidently. But you speak of the late Monsieur Prad's light-hearted behaviour—what did Monsieur Edouard think of it. Do you know?"

Paul Neveux shook his sleek head.

"I can't claim to know, with any precision. I feel tolerably certain that it never occurred to Monsieur Edouard to connect Stephane Prad's suicide with the bank-robbery, as you seem to do. The tragic event greatly depressed Monsieur Edouard. The son of his best friend, you comprehend. . . . But I think Monsieur Edouard regarded the suicide as resulting from sexual indulgences and extra-marital complications. . . ."

"Truly? Do you mean Stephane Prad had complicated his existence with other women, besides the unfortunate Clemence Bouquet?"

"That I can't say, Commissaire. All I know is, Monsieur Edouard undoubtedly felt that Stephane Prad was living in a dangerous, if not thoroughly reckless manner. One does not wish to speak ill of the dead, particularly of a man who suffered sufficiently to seek self-destruction, you comprehend . . . ?"

"Perfectly. That goes without saying, monsieur."

"Well, to be perfectly frank, almost as soon as Stephane Prad arrived from America Monsieur Edouard saw that the son of his old friend was quite unsuited as a bank director. Monsieur Edouard was very disappointed. I think Stephane Prad had been wild in youth, and had run away from home, and behaved in some way, rather foolish or even reprehensible. This I gathered from certain remarks Monsieur Edouard made from time to time. But he thought the younger man would have sobered down. . . . When it became clear that Stephane Prad's . . . er . . . irresponsibility was chronic, Monsieur Edouard contemplated some arrangement by which the partnership would be dissolved without the son of his best friend feeling injured, either financially or in his self-esteem."

"Yes. I was told about that. No such arrangement was definitely framed, I understand?"

"No. It needed some study, you comprehend? Monsieur Edouard wished to tread delicately, not to offend Stephane Prad, of whom he was fond, and to do nothing, suggest nothing, savouring of injustice."

"I understand. And did Prad know what was in the wind?"

"I think so. He was a highly intelligent man. But for certain traits and aspects of his temperament, he would have been a valuable asset to the firm."

"I see. But his temperament, and the life he had led, unfitted him for the bank-parlour. I suppose you yourself saw that, too, monsieur? Not having the same sentimental ties, as it were, you probably saw Prad's faults even more clearly than the head of the firm?"

Paul Neveux rubbed his blue chin.

"Faults . . . ?" he questioned. "I would not be prepared to speak of faults, Commissaire. After all, a man may be out of place in a bank and yet just the man to lead an army in the field, fight some forlorn hope, or bring off a score of dazzling and even magnificent achievements. But certainly Stephane Prad was not the man for us. In fact, since you ask my private opinion, I regarded him as a distinct handicap. His manner was . . . Well, for example now, to show you what I mean; we have the office sprayed now and then. Sprayed with a disinfectant against the common cold. And this stuff is, of course, scented so that it will be as pleasant as possible. Well, one day, I entered the bank, just behind Prad, and at a time when one of our uniformed porters was spraying the outer office. This, by the way, was filled by our clerks and customers.. Yet Prad behaved in a manner quite inexplicable, and wholly incorrect and unbusiness-like. He sniffed for a moment at the disinfectant, and then he said, quite loudly:

'Sapristi! Usury has never been so delicately perfumed!' Those were his words, Commissaire, and I fail to comprehend his meaning. But his look and his tone were grotesque, like those of a comedian. A clerk or two sniggered. One of our oldest customers laughed openly and loudly. You see what I mean, Commissaire? That sort of thing is bad for business. I felt obliged to report the episode to Monsieur Edouard."

Neveux looked with grave inquiry at the Commissaire and Saturnin took out a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly.

"Yes, of course," he commented. "I understand perfectly, monsieur. I think your little story fully answers the questions in my mind. Now, if you will be so good as to give me your private address and also the address of the clinic Dr. Allard runs in Passy? Then you may count upon me thoroughly to investigate the matter of this kidnapping and its last revolting feature. I rather feel that your view of the matter is correct: no doubt Edouard Lorrain, a martyr to his condition of hypertension, died from some form of shock whilst in his kidnappers' hands. And they have sent to his son this gruesome relic out of sheer baffled rage and malice. That, in any case, would appear the most probable supposition."

A few minutes later Paul Neveux took his leave, with a statement to the effect that these grim events were leaving him with more and more arduous duties and unwelcome responsibility. Left

alone, Saturnin smoked on, lighting one cigarette off the butt of another. From time to time his shaggy eyebrows knitted and he made a shorthand note. Finally he called by telephone and got Edmond Baschet, head of the technical laboratory, along to his room.

"You want me, Chief?" said Baschet, his dark, owl-like eyes wide behind their horn-rimmed spectacles, and his southern accent marred by a slight stutter.

"Yes, Edmond. I have some finger-prints for you. In fact, I have even a finger."

Saturnin pushed over the cigarette tin and Baschet looked curiously at its contents.

"*Bigre!* This is curious, eh? A lot of blood spilt, apparently. We'll see if it is mammalian. This ring goes deep. It probably wouldn't come off. This cotton wool may give us something. What's it all about, Chief?"

Saturnin gave the other some details, showing Edouard Lorrain's letters and outlining what was wanted from the technical laboratory. Finally, the Commissaire nodded towards the photograph of Jesick that Paul Neveux had handled in its shining frame.

"You'll find some prints on that frame, my boy, and I want them. They belong to a very clever gentleman, but he has no sense of humour and such men are dangerous.. Monsieur Paul Neveux. Formerly manager, now a director of the Lorrain-Prad Bank: in fact, one might almost say he is the sole director of the bank at present."

CHAPTER TWENTY: THE MISSING PHOTOGRAPHS

"It is Time itself that sheds on all things human, even on the velocipede, the antimacassar, the bustle, and the Piccadilly weeper, the last and loveliest iridescence—that of romance"

—WALTER DE LA MARE

SATURNIN DAX walked away from the clinic of Dr. Marcel Allard in Passy. Saturnin walked partly because the weather was fine but also partly because he wished to think. Amid a welter of suggestive detail, much of which appeared contradictory in its possible interpretations, certain facts emerged and seemed reasonably authentic. Thus it was plain Dr. Marcel Allard was a well known and even famous medical man whose honourable career was as open to examination as the Place de l'Etoile, and it was certain he would never allow himself to be connected with anything of a dubious, let alone criminal character.

In appearance the doctor looked rather a smaller version of Edouard Lorrain. The two were of the same vintage. They ran to beards, moustaches and hirsute adornment proudly fostered and luxuriant but *soigné*. Both men might have posed for pictures, representing eminent personages of the *fin de siècle* period.

But the doctor lacked something of old Edouard Lorrain's genial expansiveness. Dr. Allard, in fact, was a bearded monument of extreme discretion. So exquisitely diplomatic was he, so non-committal in his every studied phrase, that Saturnin had begun to despair of obtaining any useful information. Finally, however, Saturnin hit upon the right verbal gambit, the correct approach and phrase, and the doctor suddenly forgot his reserve and opened out.

He confessed that he had been horrified by the kidnapping of the old banker. Not only was he a patient but also an old friend, for Edouard Lorrain and Marcel Allard had performed their military service together in far-off, more openly martial but more actually peaceful days. Once touched in a sentimental spot the good doctor had dropped his evasions and fine phrases. In language not too technical he admitted that Edouard Lorrain had been in a perilous condition of hypertension, that it would be perfectly possible for him to die suddenly, and that the experience of some violent shock might well assist such a taking off. In fact when pressed, a year ago, to tell his old friend the truth—a truth, if not known to the patient at least strongly suspected—Dr. Allard had divulged the grim facts, which he believed Edouard had never revealed to his son, Guy. It seemed that early in his married life Edouard had lost a wife he adored, and to their one child, Guy, the banker had transferred a tenderness which was perhaps rather more than normally strong.

In discussing the kidnapping of his friend, and its gruesome consequences Dr. Allard asserted that he had seen the severed finger which had been shown to him when Neveux brought the package to Guy Lorraine that morning. It had, of course, been a dreadful shock to Guy. The doctor had been called to his resident-patient, primarily to deal with this immediate shock. At the same time the doctor examined the severed finger, and, in his judgment, it had probably been cut off before death. This opinion Dr. Allard had conveyed to Neveux, but not to Guy. Paul Neveux did not seem convinced by Dr. Allard's opinion; and, to Saturnin, the doctor admitted that the question of whether the finger had been severed before or after death, was an extremely difficult one; certainly he would not dogmatise in the matter. The amount of blood shed seemed to support the doctor's opinion. When Saturnin pointed out that there was no proof that the blood staining the cotton wool had really come from the severed finger, Dr. Allard looked, first astonished and then grim.

"I had not thought of that, Commissaire," he said. "Evidently my ingenuous mind is carried far out of its depths in this world of criminal violence and chicanery. *C'est cocasse!*"

The doctor had spoken with a mixture of disgust and a certain wry humour. Saturnin liked the man, and before the end of a rather long interview, the two of them were upon excellent terms. Dr. Allard expressed the hope that the Commissaire did not wish to interrogate his patient, Guy Lorrain, who was at present in a

highly nervous condition and had been given a sleeping draught.

"In two or three days the young man will be much better," the doctor had affirmed. "He has been playing about with drugs, and they have left him with low powers of resistance. However, he only recently began such practices, under the stress of severe emotional shock, and he cannot be called an addict. I hope, in fact, to have him in good shape within a week."

The doctor had smiled.

"There is, I believe, a lady, somewhere in the background. She has influence, far beyond my poor arts."

So Saturnin had taken his leave, without troubling the already much-troubled Guy Lorrain. As the Commissaire walked along the Rue Franklin he congratulated himself on having just dealt with a perfectly honest and completely candid witness. Dr. Allard was one of the few people in this dark case (or dark cases) whose word Saturnin felt he could trust. In fact, the most difficult feature of what Saturnin had dubbed the "Lorrain-Prad Affair" was to see clearly through the mass of subterfuge, half-lies, and downright distortions and concealments that everywhere faced him.

* * * * *

In the Avenue Hoche Saturnin entered a finely-appointed apartment house, nodded to the concierge and took the automatic lift to the top floor. Here he knocked with his knuckles three times on the door of a flat. The door was opened by Felix Norman.

"Well, my boy?" said Saturnin, as he entered the tiny hall.

The Brigadier closed the door.

"Baschet and his crowd left half an hour ago," he said. "They got all the prints they wanted. The severed finger belonged to Edouard Lorrain all right."

"Good!"

The Commissaire thumbed his moustache, left and right, and looked through the upper, glass portion of a door into a pleasant *salon* now filled with pale, winter sunshine.

"So," continued Felix. "We have the little finger identified, and we have Edouard Lorrain's prints on the letters, to back the handwriting experts who say he certainly wrote those letters. That's something, eh?"

"All right as far as it goes—like holding a girl's hand in the cinema," said Saturnin, somewhat cynically. "The old fellow did himself well, it seems."

He had opened the door of a bedroom, beyond which showed a large dressing-room. A divan-bed was covered by a magnificent bed-spread of Chinese silk. There were cupboards built into the wall, in addition to a great wardrobe. On an occasional table beside the bed was a reading-lamp, one or two medicine bottles, one of these containing iodine tablets, and some slender volumes of very modern poetry.

Saturnin walked round the bedroom and looked into cupboards and the wardrobe.

"Plenty of suits," he observed.

"Bit of an old buck," agreed Felix. "First class tailor. The cut distinctly conservative though."

Saturnin grunted and passed through into the dressing-room. This was quite large, with an expanse of parquet flooring. Besides a basin and running water, there was gear for various forms of exercise, dumb-bells, Indian clubs and an apparatus for sculling at which Felix looked enviously. A pair of foils hung on the wall.

"Quite a gymnasium," said Saturnin.

He took down one of the foils, glancing at hilt and blade and handling the weapon expertly before replacing it.

"Looks as though he kept himself fit," said Felix. "And now we are watching the river for him! Bit ironical, what?"

His superior officer made no reply to this profound observation. Instead, Saturnin retraced his steps, back through the bedroom, and came to the little *salon*, off the hall. This room obviously served as a dining-room where Edouard Lorrain ate, on the comparatively rare occasions when he had his meals in the apartment: and also the room was used to write in, for a small, elegant desk stood between two windows.

"He seldom took his meals here, although it's a service-flat," said Felix. "Only the morning coffee, as a rule. And he had valet service from the concierge's son, and kept no servants. The desk there doesn't hold much. Did practically all his correspondence at the bank. . . ."

Saturnin went over to the desk and sat down in front of it. There were a number of pigeon-holes and he went through them, systematically. For the most part these pigeon-holes contained only old, yellowed papers. There were receipted bills; there were lists and catalogues dealing with wines and sales of wines by auction; there were newer catalogues dealing with flowers, seeds and plants and various garden utensils. Opening a drawer the Commissaire found a large book, about half filled with articles and press-cuttings. The press-cuttings referred to Edouard Lorrain, his marriage, the birth of his son, his editorship of *Le Veau d'Or*, a duel he had fought with a certain noble Marquis, said to have lent his name to a shady financial concern.

Saturnin turned the pages of this book, browned with age and conveying memories of an epoch irrevocably dead and buried. Pasted across these pages were fiery articles, signed "Panache," but obviously written by a young, impetuous, idealistic Edouard Lorrain, a tilter at windmills and a Daniel come to judgment. The Commissaire glanced over several of these articles, and then, as he turned a page, he came upon a faded photograph. A young, rather pretty woman, whose curling hair was piled high and whose silk gown was out-moded. On the woman's lap sat a pale languid looking child clad in a velvet suit, and with ringlets very like those of the mother.

"Guy Lorrain, I suppose?" said Felix, who had glanced over his chief's shoulders. "Or is it a girl? Was there a sister?"

"No girl. This is our friend Guy, his mother's darling, no doubt, and certainly the apple of his father's eye. I wonder. . . ?"

The Commissaire did not say what had caused him to wonder. He turned another page. This was stained to a tobacco shade at the edges with age. Written, in Edouard Lorrain's bold hand were the words: Snapshots of Francine and Guy.

But the page was empty. There were signs that gummed papers had been pulled away, leaving roughened, light squares amid the faded brown.

"Snapshots," Saturnin murmured. "Yet there are no snapshots. Well, well!"

He rose from the desk and twined the scarf about his neck.

Felix Norman looked at his superior officer a little anxiously. Felix had previously searched the flat of the vanished banker and now the Brigadier was wondering if he had missed some clue that Saturnin's keen eyes had spotted.

"Have you found something?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy. I find I am cold and require a hot grog. *Allons!* There's quite a decent café at the corner."

And Felix sighed, reflecting that there were times when the Commissaire's reticence could be rather hard to bear.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: ACCORDING TO PLAN

"To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect."

OSCAR WILDE.

EMILE CHARTRETTES glanced over an old letter and some notes he had once made upon the letter, he smiled to himself as at an amusing memory, then he dropped letter and notes into his open stove. The drawer that he had taken right out of his desk was now empty. Chartrettes screwed the top on his stove and replaced the empty drawer. He yawned and began to hum a jazz dance tune. So humming, he crossed to a cracked piece of mirror hanging upon the office wall and surveyed his features. He looked critically at his teeth. From a waist-coat pocket he took a comb and passed it through his thin, reddish hair, which shone with brilliantine.

"Densie," he called.

The door of his office opened and his secretary came in. She wore a costume of dark red wool with hat and shoes to match. She carried gloves, a bag, and a hip-length cloak composed of silver foxes.

"I want my lunch," she announced.

She slipped into her furs and began to pull on a pair of new white kid gloves. In the mirror Chartrettes watched her with approval.

"Shall we go to the Griffon or Viel's?" she said. "Damn these gloves!"

"I'm going to ask you to lunch by yourself, to-day," said Chartrettes. "Also to do me a little favour."

He slipped a wallet from his pocket, took out two notes for a thousand francs each and handed them to her.

"I reckon we can both do with a short holiday," he said. "I am thinking of closing the office for a time."

"Yes . . . ?"

She looked thoughtfully at the money, and then put it, casually, into her dark red bag.

"How long ?"

"I don't quite know."

He turned from watching her in the glass and put an arm about her shoulders.

"Probably a week. But it might be a fortnight, or even longer. I thought you would like to go to London, to your sister's, eh ?"

"What, on two thousand francs ? What do I use for money ?"

"I'd write you, later. When my plans are more definite, I'll let you know."

"All right. That would suit me. What have you got on to, Emile ?" A good mug, eh ? To-day, it's only the mugs who have any cash."

He shifted his clasp lower, to her waist.

"Better you know nothing," he said. "At least for the present."

"Right. As long as you don't come back with dark hairs on your coat."

Complacently she patted her own suspiciously golden locks left largely uncovered by the extravagant hat.

"No fear of it," he told her. "I prefer blondes. The only gentlemanly thing about me, what !"

He kissed her where her neck showed between the dark furs and the tiny red hat.

"You know that, anyway, you little devil !"

"I take nothing for granted."

She smiled up at him, and then her mouth hardened.

"What's the little favour you spoke of ?"

"A nothing," he shrugged. "I'm being followed, that's all. And to-day I want to slip the shadower, and I need your help."

"Followed ? By *flics* ? I thought I'd seen one around here lately. I've spotted him twice, staring in the window of that travel-bureau place. He didn't look like winter sports or the Riviera. More like Luna Park and the exterior boulevards . . . But, you've never told me of this."

He shrugged again.

"Why worry ? It's been of no consequence. If I'd told you, maybe you'd have looked a bit queer, and acted in a way to show them we knew. I depend on the element of surprise to slip the fellow, to-day. Even then it's got to be the right one, the man you saw."

"There are two then ?"

"At least two. They take over, one from the other. One of them is a fellow named Georges Alder. I hope he's not on to me now. If he is, I'll wait. He's hot. But the others I can slip."

"I see. What do you . . . ?"

"We'll work like this. As usual, we'll go out together for lunch. But, down in the street, we stop and talk a bit. I'll light a cigarette. Whilst we talk, I'll see if Alder is on the job, or one of the others. It's not usually Alder till the evening, so I'm counting on it being one of the others. If it is, I'll raise my hat to you, as I walk off."

"I see. Quite the gentleman! And if it's Alder, you don't raise your hat, and your stunt is postponed?"

"Correct. But, if I raise my hat, that means I'm going to a little restaurant called Au Petit Riche in the Rue Le Peletier."

"I think I know it. A corner place? You took me there once?"

Yes. Well I want you to go to the garage. Get out the car. See that the tank is filled. Then drive the car to the Rue Rossini; leaving it beside the restaurant Au Petit Riche, but on the other side of the street, and headed away from the main boulevards. The restaurant is flanked at one side by the Rue Rossini; though the main entrance is in the Rue Le Peletier, do you get it?"

"I think so. That is, I see what you want me to do. I get the car and drive it to the Rue Rossini, leaving it near the corner joining the Rue Le Peletier, and beside this restaurant, but across the street?"

"Exactly."

"But how are you going to dodge the *flic* who follows you? Probably he'll enter the restaurant, too. How do you get out and into your car without being seen? Do you depend on speed to get away? He might have a taxi handy. Do you want me to be waiting in the car, with the engine running at a certain time?"

Chartrettes shook his foxy, reddish head and leered at her.

"Leave it to me, my dear. All I want you to do is to drive the car to the spot I've indicated. Get it there at half past two and then leave it. Your job's over then, and you return to the office. If I don't phone you, or return, I've slipped the *flics*, and your holiday begins. Both our holidays begin. You go to your sister in London, and have a good time. Later I'll write to you and send some cash. In fact I may come to London, too. You see? It's perfectly clear?"

"Quite," she said. "It's as easy as selling beer to sailors. And, if it all goes smoothly I'll cross to London, to-night. But don't forget to write me. London is expensive."

She turned in his arms and lifted her head. He stooped quickly and kissed her on the mouth.

Saturnin Dax looked up as Georges Alder entered the office.

The Commissaire laid down his pen and picked up a packet of cigarettes.

"Well, Georges? Found out how it happened?"

The Brigadier nodded gloomily, sat down and accepted a *Maryland jaune*.

"It was tricky. I don't see how Pellegrin was really at fault. The whole thing was carefully planned, and one man on his own would be pretty helpless."

"Yes . . . ?"

Saturnin walked over to the stove and stood with his back to it.

"Chartrettes lunched alone, to-day, *patron*. He left the girl. Went to a restaurant called *Au Petit Riche*."

"In the Rue Le Peletier. I know it. Good place!"

Georges Alder smiled sadly.

"In the Rue Le Peletier—yes. But it has a side-door, not generally used, opening on the Rue Rossini."

"Aha!"

"If you know the place you'll remember it consists of a series of small rooms opening off a long tiled passage. The entrance, a revolving door, is in the Rue Le Peletier, and it's the only door clients generally use. Obviously if the door, right at the other side of the series of rooms were commonly in use, customers might go out and, well, forget to pay their bills."

"Evidently. But Chartrettes found a pretext to have this side door opened and was let out that way, eh?"

"Yes. It's usually kept locked, I think. Chartrettes went to the restaurant. He passed through to the room right at the end. Pellegrin, who didn't want to attract attention, took a seat in the adjoining room—the last but one, as you might call it. The place was crowded, as it generally is, and Pellegrin could not, for some time, get a seat, from where he could see his man. He relied on the supposed fact that Chartrettes must come out the way he went in."

Saturnin sighed, whilst Alder looked anxious.

"Really, it might have happened to any of us, *patron*. I think . . ."

"There are mirrors on the wall, Georges. I know the place. Never mind. What happened? You've seen the waiter who served Chartrettes?"

"Yes." Georges grinned. "Chartrettes told him he was being followed by a detective, and wanted to give the fellow the slip."

"What!"

"A private agent—employed by an imaginary Madame Chartrettes. Not bad, eh? Chartrettes even indicated where poor Pellegrin was sitting. The waiter, who is married himself, was very sympathetic towards Chartrettes. The man got the key of the side-door from the proprietor and quietly opened the door for Chartrettes who tipped him well."

"Naturally! Very generous! And Pellegrin saw and heard nothing?"

He wouldn't *patron*. He was tucked away in a corner of the

next room. The only seat he could get when he entered. Later, about half past two, the place was emptying. Pellegrin complained of an imaginary draught and moved to where he could see the next room reflected in a mirror. He at once missed Chartrettes. Going into the next room he spotted the other door. It's generally pretty well concealed by a large wooden screen, but the waiter had moved this when he let Chartrettes out.

"Pellegrin 'phoned me at once. He's in a state."

Saturnin grunted.

"Anything else?"

"Not much. Chartrettes went off in his car. The waiter saw him just get into it. Alone, the waiter says. The car—the Swedish Volvo—had been left standing, empty, in the Rue Rossini, about half past two. It was not standing there more than a few minutes. Chartrette's secretary got it out of the garage in the Rue Taitbout, some time after two. She had the tank filled up. The whole thing was planned, pretty slickly."

"Evidently."

Saturnin lifted his coat at the back and shifted closer to his stove.

"Who is the girl? What is she?"

"Stenographer, she calls herself, *patron*."

Georges Alder shrugged.

"Name, Denise Megard. Mother is a *femme de menage*. Respectable woman, living and working in Levallois. The girl runs her own flat now. In the Rue Fourcroy, in the seventeenth *arrondissement*. We've got nothing against her. Her talents and activities, normally, are not likely to concern us."

"Good! All the same, she parked the car for Chartrettes. What did she do then?"

"She returned to the office."

"Ah . . . ? For how long?"

"She remained for about an hour. At half past three she went home."

"To her flat in the Rue Fourcroy?"

"Yes, *patron*."

"She locked the office then, and took the keys home with her?"

"She locked up. But she left the keys with the concierge. She said Monsieur Chartrettes might return between five and six."

Saturnin grunted. Thoughtfully, he brushed his moustache, to left and right with a broad thumb.

Georges Alder rose slowly.

"The car tank was filled right up," he said. "Do you want a description sent out? I've got it ready . . . But perhaps you'll wait till six and see if Chartrettes returns to his office? He lives in the Rue Demours, quite close to the lady-secretary, but he's not been there."

The Commissaire walked slowly to his desk and lit a fresh cigarette very deliberately.

"Send out your description, Georges. Warn all stations. We won't wait till six. I think it's too likely that is just what Chartrettes wants. You've got all particulars of the Swedish Volvo, eh?"

"Yes, *patron*. Every detail. We'll pick him up wherever he's gone."

Saturnin nodded.

"All right Georges. But I don't want the man arrested, or even a'armed. Move discreetly."

He sighed.

"What I'd really like to know is, where he's gone and whom he is meeting."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: RENDEZVOUS

"If you cannot bite never show your teeth."—IRISH PROVERB

DUSK had fallen when Emile Chartrettes stopped his car in the wide grass-flanked road where a little café and half a dozen non-descript shops proclaimed a tiny village. Chartrettes lit a cigarette. Alighting stiffly, he opened a door at the back of his car and rummaged for a while amid an untidy assortment of articles. There was a rug, a very old overcoat, some tools, an old tyre and a new mackintosh. In the pocket of this mackintosh Chartrettes found what he sought, and, pulling out the map, he studied it carefully. Two minutes later he walked into the village café.

He was greeted by the *patron*, who was alone with one waiter, for it was too early for the local, agrestic customers, and any other clients were rare. There was an exchange of salutations. Chartrettes ordered a hot grog and invited the proprietor to join him. The proprietor, a big man with a large expanse of red neck above a collarless shirt, remarked that it was a cold day and a *grog Americaine* would certainly be comforting. He packed off the waiter for lemon and hot water.

"I suppose," said Chartrettes, casually, "I am not more than two kilometres away from Pont de Lyss?"

The café proprietor nodded.

"Less than that, monsieur. I put the distance at one and a half kilometres. A charming town, Pont de Lyss, is it not? I have a brother there who runs an excellent hotel . . ."

With an eye to the main chance the *patron* expatiated upon the excellence and cheapness of the hotel run by his brother. It was, it seemed, much favoured by commercial gentlemen on the road to and from Paris. Chartrettes sipped his grog and listened patiently. He did not repudiate the notion that he might be travelling commercially, in fact he smiled indulgently over the conception. The grog consumed, the proprietor insisted upon Chartrettes having a second one "on the house." So, considerably warmed and still

smiling to himself, Chartrettes entered the telephone cabinet which stood at the end of the café beyond two dingy-looking billiard tables.

The cabinet had a sound-proof door which Chartrettes carefully closed; then, without referring to the local directory or to any personal notes, the private inquiry-agent called for a 'Pont de Lyss' number.

In about twenty seconds he got his connection, but he was answered by the voice of a man, and it was a voice Chartrettes did not recognize. In a flash the smile left his face.

"Who is that speaking?" he said sharply.

"It is Charles, monsieur," said the voice. "The domestic of Monsieur Robert Organd. It is with Monsieur Robert Organd that monsieur would speak, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Yes," said Chartrettes, shortly.

"If monsieur will hold on for a little instant . . ."

Chartrettes heard the sound of a receiver being put down on hard wood. Steps were retreating from the instrument and seemingly resounding on a tiled hall.

"Monsieur Organd. You are there . . .?"

Chartrettes sucked his lower lip and gnawed at it in deep thought. The naturally crafty expression of his face was immensely intensified as he stood there, listening. For what seemed to him a long time he stood with the receiver to his ears; then came a long, striding step, and a voice he knew.

"Yes . . .?"

"Allo, that is Monsieur Robert Organd, of the Villa des Violettes, Pont de Lyss?"

There was quite a long pause and Chartrettes had repeated his question before the voice he knew admitted the identity signified.

"Good! This is Emile Chartrettes, here. I should like to see you, in a quarter of an hour's time."

There was another pause, almost as long, and then the voice said, questioningly:

"Emile Chartrettes? I don't quite . . .?"

"Yes. The agent. I had some work recently at St. Remi. You know St. Remi, do you not? And Emile Chartrettes, eh? You got my letter, eh? Come, come!"

"Ah, yes."

The voice seemed to indicate a mind cleared of its doubts.

"Well, Monsieur Chartrettes, perhaps you will come directly to the villa? You are coming from Paris, by car, I presume? If so, your machine will be safe in the garden of the villa, and whilst we have our little talk . . ."

Chartrettes laughed, interrupting the other. The inquiry agent's laugh had little suggestion of merriment, and his teeth showed in a way that momentarily transformed the fox into a wolf.

"Nothing doing," he said, coarsely. "I am not entering any villa of yours this evening, Monsieur—Organd. *Fichtre, non!* You think that, after twenty years of my business I don't know

enough to come in out of the rain ? You think you can roll me, *hein?* ”

“ Well, what do you suggest ? ”

The voice spoke again, patiently, after a pause of lesser duration. Chartrettes gnawed his under-lip and considered.

“ Listen,” he said. “ I want the money I mentioned in my letter, eh ? ”

“ Yes, that it understood. I have it for you, here. If you will come . . . ”

“ Listen! I'll do the talking. You listen,” said Chartrettes, savagely. “ You are to go at once, with the money, to the Café de la Renaissance, in the public square. You know it, eh ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ All right. Sit there on the *terrasse* until I come.”

“ On the *terrasse* ? It will be cold.”

“ So much the better. We neither of us wish, particularly, to be seen, eh ? Not together, in any case. And the *terrasse* is glassed in, and has stoves, *n'est-ce-pas* . . . ? ”

“ Yes, yes. That is all right. And you can park your car somewhere in the square. I congratulate you, monsieur, on your knowledge of our locality.”

A laugh came over the telephone, but Chartrettes ignored irony and laughter.

“ In a quarter of an hour,” he said. “ With the money ; without fail.”

He rang off. At the little zinc bar he paid the *patron* for the grog and the telephone call. It was almost dark when Chartrettes went out.

• • • • •

A little more than forty minutes later Chartrettes was again in his car and at the wheel, but, this time, he was running away from Pont de Lyss. His engine hummed, and Chartrettes sang with it a dance tune popular on the boulevards.

Emile Chartrettes was at peace with the world. In fact he felt something more than such merely negative contentment. He was uplifted by a positive thrill of pride, satisfaction, and immense gratification over his own slickness in a tricky negotiation. All had gone with the utmost smoothness, and in his breast pocket was a most pleasing bulge, made by a thick wad of paper money. Certainly things had gone well, and there had been none of those difficulties he had rather anticipated. He had been a little foolish about the self-styled Robert Organd. That gentleman had undoubtedly done some very smart work, some very daring and clever work, but, after all . . .

Chartrettes smiled to himself. The more formidable he pictured the gentleman known as Robert Organd, the more deft and brilliant must this recent exploit appear: for, if Organd was so clever and dangerous, how extraordinarily capable must be the man who had just taken a large sum of money from Organd. Nor would that

large sum be all that Chartrettes meant to take. Not by any means

Chartrettes smilingly checked the speed of his car. He had earned a cigarette, a peaceful cigarette, but this was not the time to incur an accident by fooling about at the wheel, although the road was clear. So he slackened his speed to a crawl, whilst with one hand he felt for a tin of twenty-five Turmacs which were in a pocket, or somewhere . . . ? ”

Had he left them in the mackintosh at the back ?

It was a quiet, deserted road, and Chartrettes felt that he need not worry about traffic. However he put out a hand, and was thinking of stopping altogether, when something happened. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw a movement of a rug, or old raincoat in the back of his car. There was a faint sound, which might have been caused by tools rattling, or a foot perhaps striking the tools . . . ?

A horrible wave of cold, stark fear swept over Chartrettes. In a flash he remembered entering his car in that dark square without even glancing at the back seat and piled junk. Had there . . . ?

But Chartrettes was not given more time for reflection. A man had half risen and was crouched behind the driver of the car. A hand pressed a pistol barrel behind and below the inquiry agent's right ear.

“ Draw in at once,” said a harsh voice. “ There. Under those trees. Now stop ! ”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: LATE UNLAMENTED.

“ Le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque bel soit la comédie en tout la reste. On jette enfin de la terre sur la tête, et en voilà pour jamais.”

—PASCAL

THE Swedish Volvo saloon looked decidedly incongruous, half hidden in a clump of holly bushes in the depths of the Forest of Fontainebleau. The wheels sank amid fallen leaves, red, golden and tobacco-yellow ; and there was nothing that could fairly be called a road within a kilometre of this deserted spot. The body of Emile Chartrettes lay sprawled across the untidy collection of miscellaneous articles in the back of his car. A bullet had been fired through his head, entering behind the right ear, whilst another shot had been put into his back and spine. The expression of the dead face was serene. Around the neck, hung by a string, was a square of white cardboard on which was printed, in ink and block-capitals, the English word: *Traitor*.

Saturnin Dax stepped back from the body, and he yawned because it was early morning and he had been roused from his slumbers in a manner he considered precipitate. He glanced at Georges Alder.

"He made an appointment, Georges, and it was kept!"

The Brigadier's naturally sallow face flushed slightly.

"Bad business his giving us the slip yesterday. Bad for all concerned. Surgeon reckons he was killed somewhere around fourteen to sixteen hours ago. That means soon after dark yesterday evening."

"Yes. It would be after dark," said Saturnin. "Almost certainly . . ."

He was looking about in the interior of the car and leaned forward to pick up a piece of chewing-gum, well chewed. He smelt it, examined it closely, and then put it away in an empty match-box.

Georges Alder watched, but made no comment on the discovery.

"It was a bit of luck his being found so soon, *patron*. The body might have been hidden a week, for in the winter few people come here. But some kids were out, after chestnuts. Saw wheel-tracks under the trees and followed. Boy Scout experience, you know. The poor little devils got a shock, but they didn't lose the north. One kid is a nephew of the *garde-champêtre*. They ran and fetched him. The *garde* found things just as you originally saw them, and he remained here whilst his nephew went for the locals. Their surgeon will be coming back soon. And our technical crowd . . ."

Saturnin nodded. His eyes were continually alert as he listened.

"Chartrettes was not killed here, in these woods, Georges. Or even nearby. He was shot in the driver's seat, at point-blank range. The body was then pulled over the seats, dumped in the back here, and covered with a rug."

Alder nodded, and glanced to where the contents of the dead man's pockets had been spread out, upon a handkerchief, on the front seat of the car.

"That gun was in his hip-pocket," said the Brigadier. "He must have been taken completely on the hop. Gave a lift to someone, probably. A stranger, perhaps, or someone he thought a friend. The murderer got his man as he pulled up to light a cigarette. There's the cigarette he never lit. Operator put a shot through the head. Then another into the spine. A second shot wasn't needed, but the fellow got rattled. They generally do."

Saturnin grunted.

"The point is this. Chartrettes slipped us because he wanted to get away to blackmail someone. This person was probably concerned in those St. Remi murders. There might be more than one person . . ."

Saturnin paused for a moment, considering this.

"Yes, there may well be at least two people concerned. Chartrettes would write, or telephone, making an appointment—for the purpose of blackmail. And they were too smart for him."

Georges Alder looked puzzled.

"You think these gangsters who kidnapped Édouard Lorrain also faked those suicides at St. Remi?"

"Not necessarily, Georges."

"But surely gangsters did this job. The sign of *Traitor*, that's English, eh? And the chewing-gum you just found. Americans, and American methods, *n'est-ce-pas*?"

Saturnin shook his head.

"You think Chartrettes was in the kidnapping himself, and yet tried to blackmail his associates? Doesn't seem to make sense, Georges. But, one thing at a time. What happened? Where did Chartrettes go, after he left Paris, yesterday afternoon?"

"Well . . . ?"

Alder took a look at indicators on the dash board and then consulted a small pocket note-book.

"I can tell you this, *patron*: the car travelled 256 kilometres after leaving the Paris garage yesterday. The tank was filled at the start. A calculation may point to where Chartrettes went."

"Good work, Georges." Saturnin's eyes were abstracted. "That glamorous secretary arranged about the car and took it to the Rue Rossini. Perhaps, after all, we'd better have a talk with her."

"She seldom gets to the office before ten in the morning. It takes her a long time to fix her hair and nails. Shall I go and phone Paris to . . . ?"

"Not just yet. Let's figure out what happened, Georges. Chartrettes has no money in his pockets, but I'm pretty certain he was out for blackmail. I saw it on his foxy face, weeks ago. He concealed something, protecting some person or persons so as to soak them. But if this is true, then he was killed yesterday by people he tried to blackmail, and not by any kidnapping gang. Chartrettes was up to some blackmailing stunt, I'm sure, long before Edouard Lorrain had been kidnapped. So I think the placard there, and probably the chewing-gum, too, are meant to lead us into thinking Chartrettes betrayed a gang. But Chartrettes was not the sort to join a dangerous criminal gang, let alone betray such people. And, if he belonged, and shared their guilt, he could hardly betray, with much profit to himself . . . No, it looks as though the person, or persons, Chartrettes wanted to blackmail met him yesterday, and killed him. The person, or persons, naturally know all about the famous kidnapping of Edouard Lorrain. So the actual killer tries to fasten his work on these gangsters. But anyone can buy a packet of chewing-gum, Georges. A lot of French people, nowadays, are even chewing the stuff, I'm sorry to say."

"Yes."

Georges Alder nodded vigorously.

"That sounds all right to me, *patron*. Chartrettes wrote or phoned to his client or clients. But they were too smart for him. They make a rendezvous for a quiet spot, where it's lonely and dark, and . . ."

"Wait a bit." Saturnin frowned. "I don't like that. Chartrettes was a type at once crafty and unscrupulous, yet timid, or

at least, far from reckless. I don't see him keeping appointments with murderers in a lonely place after dark. More likely he himself dictated the meeting-place, and he'd do it shortly before the appointment-time, to eliminate counter-plots. If he agreed to a lonely place it would be, at least, in daylight. If it were not daylight, then Chartrettes would insist on a public place."

Abstractedly Saturnin shook a packet of cigarettes and pulled one out with his mobile lips.

"Chartrettes got out of the car," Alder pointed out. "His shoes have mud on them. But he didn't walk far, or for long. It's been raining heavily all over the country for the last week, on and off."

"Just so, Georges. He wouldn't go to a house owned by his potential victim. I doubt whether Chartrettes would even call at a hotel, for he was dealing with a dangerous man, and knew it. I think we can take it that Chartrettes drove close to the place where his victim, or victims live. He then telephoned. He demanded that one of them met him, with money, within the next few minutes. And he would, almost certainly, meet only one man.

"That's it, *patron*. Chartrettes phoned before dark, yesterday. He was killed earlier than the surgeon reckons. He made a rendezvous for a quiet bit of a road, where a fair amount of traffic usually passes. He never left his car. The client entered the car to talk things over. He pretended to be scared and helpless. Then he handed over the cash, and, as Chartrettes was counting it and feeling excited and off his guard, the other drew a gun and shot him. The murderer took a big chance. But, at that moment, there was no traffic. Sometimes there isn't—even on a normally busy road."

"Maybe . . ." Saturnin looked doubtful. "That presupposes two things that I don't much like. The surgeon is considerably out. That might be—we can get another opinion; and the autopsy will give us something more definite. What I like even less is the idea of Chartrettes being trapped so easily. Letting a potential murderer sit behind him . . ."

"Suppose Chartrettes was on his way to blackmail a fellow whom he knows," said Alder. "Chartrettes isn't aware of it, but this fellow knows he's coming, and a confederate who is unknown to Chartrettes waylays him, gets a lift in the car on some excuse and kills Chartrettes. I'm getting 'em mixed, but you see what . . . ?"

"I see, Georges, but there are objections, in plenty. Chartrettes was killed in the car, but a long way from here. So the murderer drove away, with a corpse, taking great risks, even if it was dark. If that reasoning is sound, Chartrettes was driven away to conceal from us the actual place where he was killed—because in that place live the people he wanted to blackmail. There'd be no purpose in driving the car so far otherwise. It could be concealed anywhere in this forest, or in many other lonely places at night, without driving so far. Your idea, that Chartrettes was waylaid and killed long before he got to his victim's home presupposes that, whilst

you've been watching Chartrettes, this murderer was doing so, too. Just as you knew the speedometer registration there, the murderer knew it too, and had to try and confuse us as to where Chartrettes went. Also, Chartrettes must have arrived at his destination, if I'm right, and the murderer aimed at concealing it."

"That's true," said Alder. "I'm wrong. I'll swear no one has been watching Chartrettes lately except us."

Saturnin threw away the butt of his cigarette, and it fell among some damp leaves.

"I think what happened was probably this, Georges. Chartrettes drove to somewhere near his destination and then phoned his potential victim. It was dark, or at least dusk. Chartrettes gave the other a rendezvous for some public place, a frequented thoroughfare or a café. And the time fixed would be short, so that the other could not think too much. But the potential victim had with him some friend. Someone ready to do murder. Which suggests someone as deep in the St. Remi affair as the man Chartrettes was after. Perhaps Chartrettes was blackmailing both. Anyhow, there are two. And, in a few minutes, they make their plan. One will go to the café, or given rendezvous, to hand Chartrettes the money he demands. The rendezvous necessitates Chartrettes parking his car—it's probably in a large town. And whilst one fellow meets Chartrettes and pays up, his pal conceals himself there, in the back of the car, where I just found the chewing-gum. You see? Even if Chartrettes locked the doors here, any crook could get in."

"Yes, yes!"

Georges Alder was almost excited.

"You've got it, *patron*. That fits. Then Chartrettes comes back, flushed with success and his pockets full. Perhaps he's had a drink or two in the café. Anyway, he steps into the front driver's seat, without a look behind him, and he drives away, out of the town. Then, in a quiet bit of road, he stops for a cigarette, and the murderer comes from under the rug there, and shoots him. So, the money changes hands again. Neat work!"

Saturnin grunted.

"Pity he had his tank filled up. Did it so that we wouldn't trace him to some filling station. Now it helps his murderer, though the car may have been seen yesterday . . ."

As he spoke the Commissaire was lifting things out of the back of the car. He took out the rug, examined it, and shook it. He felt beneath the dead body. He found a mackintosh and drew articles from its pockets.

"Look at this, Georges."

Saturnin had in his hands a large-scale map, and this was folded so that one section was presented to view.

"*Sapristi!* That looks like it. He was using that map, and just that section of it, eh?"

"I think so. And there's only one large town there. Pont de

Lyss. We'll work on that, Georges. If the distance from Paris to Pont de Lyss suits your calculations on petrol consumption and speedometer figures, then Pont de Lyss looks like the spot Chartrettes was aiming at."

"And the place where the blackmailed men live, eh? Or one of them, at least. And you reckon, *patron*, that the St. Remi murderer, or murderers, were the object of Chartrettes' attention?"

"I do. To begin with, Chartrettes knew that affair was murder, though we have let it pass as suicide in the newspapers. Secondly, Chartrettes was the blackmailing type, the petty criminal, and not the bold gangster or murderer. After all, you know him pretty well, Georges. His business has been going down hill for a long time, but he still gets money. Where? Not from kidnapping and desperate apache methods. No. Blackmailing married women, or selling information was more in Chartrettes's line."

Saturnin now had in his gloved hands an old tyre, and he was feeling, more or less mechanically, beneath the hard rubber casing and the soft inner tube. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. He had pulled out a piece of paper, and it was revealed as a note for one hundred francs . . .

Saturnin felt further, his fingers travelling around in a circle. More notes were extracted, whilst Alder stared. Altogether Saturnin discovered three hundred notes hidden in the old tyre in the back of the car.

"Thunder of God," he whispered.

"I don't understand," said Alder. "Did he get the money, and hide it before he was killed. But, in that case, the murderer was never hidden there, in the back of the car. After all, perhaps he really was one of a gang, and double-crossed them, eh?"

"I don't know—there's something queer. . . ."

Saturnin stared before him and thumbed his moustache slowly to left or right. Mechanically he was counting the notes, with more than half his mind elsewhere.

"Thirty thousand francs, Georges. Not a bad touch. I wonder. . . ."

Suddenly he broke off with an exclamation, looked narrowly at a note or two, and then held out a sheaf of them towards the Brigadier.

"Take a look, Georges. Note the serial numbers. You recognise them, no? Well, they're the bills we got from Guy Lorrain and which our technical department marked invisibly. I remember the numbers; and Baschet will soon be able to answer for the markings."

"That's queer, *patron*. Those marked notes were among the 250,000 francs the gang took off Guy Lorrain. But surely that settles it? Chartrettes got mixed up, somehow, with the kidnappers. Perhaps the gang were hired to kill Stephane Prad, and, afterwards to kill Chartrettes. But he got money out of them first, and hid it. Or else. . . ."

"Wait." Saturnin took off his hat and wiped his forehead. "Not too much theory at one time, Georges. We'd better suspend judgment till we get more facts. And the first fact we want is this: where did the murderer go, after he left the car in this forest? Also *how* did he go, without the car? He'd hardly stay around here, and he'd hardly walk to Paris—or to Pont de Lyss. I think that's our first line of inquiry."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: ANOTHER PART OF THE WOOD

"Ignorance is the first requisite of the historian—ignorance which simplifies and omits with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art.—LYTTON STRACHEY

LATE the same evening Felix Norman came into the office of Saturnin Dax in the Quai des Orfèvres. The Brigadier was in motor-ing kit and looked travel-stained; he was, however, fresh and alert enough to all appearances.

"Well, my boy, any luck?"

Saturnin put down his pen and pushed aside a dossier which was assuming formidable proportions.

"I think I've got something, but not much."

Felix took off a pair of pigskin gloves and a light coat. Slowly he drew out his calabash and pouch and seated himself.

"The little village of Blaise is barely two kilometres from the spot in the woods where Chartrettes was found dead. The village is altogether unaccustomed to excitement, and, even in winter, some of the natives stare through doors and windows like cows regarding the passing train. Sometimes the gazers are rewarded. A cyclist is bitten by a dog, or a horse falls down in the shafts. Such events render conversation less difficult in the café, by providing fresh topics for two or three days' talk."

"Just so," said Saturnin, nodding. "A charming picture. When I retire from this dog's *metier*, perhaps I will take a house at Blaise, with plenty of front windows. But, possibly you are being ironical at the expense of my good future fellow-villagers?"

"No," Felix blew out a cloud of smoke and contemplated the blue haze beneath the electric light.

"To-night, at least, I feel as though just sitting and staring would form an ideal existence. Certainly the practice has its uses for us. Outside the Café de la Forêt no less than five separate witnesses observed a man, who last night, appeared to be riding about aimlessly on a motor-bike combination. This man passed through the village several times. There was no passenger in his side-car. When he was first seen he came through the little main street in the wake of a Swedish Volvo saloon."

"Ah! Good!"

"A garage-hand and a man with a bicycle-repair shop both

answer for the Swedish Volvo, which passed, with the motor-bike and empty side-car some twenty metres behind. A few minutes later the man on the motor-bike returned through the village. In fact he passed backwards and forwards several times. Quite enough to stir the more active Blaise intelligences into a fury of conjecture. Was the man lost? Why, on a cold night, did he keep up this odd patrol? Why did he not ask his way, if he were lost? And, at least, why did he not take a grog or brandy at the Café de la Foret?"

"Evidently! The local talent did not get the number of the car or motor-bike?"

"No. They went through quickly. Also the habitués of the Café de la Foret were sitting inside and had a view of passing traffic only through the open door and a clouded window. One or other of them went to the door when the motor-bike was heard. But they centred their interest on the rider rather than on his machine. Apparently he had a hat and scarf they recognized each time he passed; a soft grey hat inappropriate for such an occasion, and a long scarf dangling dangerously near the back wheel. Also some of them recognized the sound of the engine, after it had passed twice."

"So you got some description of the motor-cyclist then?"

Felix nodded, and then grimaced.

"But not too good. He did finally pull up for a drink. But he never left his machine. Called for a cognac and the *garçon*, a boy of fifteen, took out the drink. The boy says the client was clean-shaven, with horn rimmed spectacles which he put on to look in his wallet, taking off goggles to do this. He was chewing gum before he got his drink. Tall, clean-shaven and thin the *garçon* says. In the side-car there was a copy of the *New York Herald*, and the boy says the client was an American. He made some sort of joke at which the boy laughed politely but which he did not understand. The client had an accent when he spoke French, but he was a *chic* type and gave ten francs for a six-franc cognac, leaving the change."

"Does this boy really know the *New York Herald* when he sees it? And can he detect an American accent?"

"He knows various journals when he sees them. His mother runs a newspaper kiosk at Fontainebleau. But as for being a judge of accents and so forth, I'm sure he knows nothing about them. I tried him in English and he did not comprehend a word."

"Is it possible?"

"It is," Felix flushed. "He has never in his life travelled beyond Fontainebleau, and that he considers foreign parts. No, the *garçon* was probably meant to be deceived, by an English phrase in stage-American, and gum-chewing and the newspaper would do the trick by themselves. Anyway, the important thing is, I think, that this unknown avoided attention as much as he could. He deliberately kept outside the café and even on the fringe of its none too brilliant lights. It looks as though he had to pass through now and then, but he did so at some speed. But for the peculiarly leisured atmosphere

enjoyed in the village of Blaise our motor-cyclist would scarcely have been observed, almost certainly never remembered."

"Yes. . ." Saturnin lit a cigarette. "He had to keep passing. Then he was awaiting someone, eh ?"

"He was. Moreover he met someone, a few minutes after he had taken his cognac. A man appeared down the road, whistled, and immediately started walking off in the direction of Fontainebleau. This man was scarcely observed at all. He came from the forest and remained always in the shadows of the wide village street. But the citizens of Blaise agreed that he was short and of a square figure and wore a light mackintosh. Also they are convinced he whistled as a signal to the man on the motor-bike combination, who at once called *bon soir* and went away in the Fontainebleau direction. His engine was heard to stop a minute later ; then, after a few seconds, it went on again. The motor-cyclist was not seen again that night in Blaise. But I think he and his companion were seen in Fontainebleau."

"Ah! Good work! "

"About eleven last night, a motor-cycle combination drew up in front of Fontainebleau railway station. A man in a light mackintosh and goggles got out of the side-car. He, and the man mounted on the machine, changed places, after several minutes of talk. This talk took place outside the station, and a porter, on the look-out for a possible *pourboire*, managed to hang around. He says he thought the two men were *messieurs*, with money, and English or American. His word can't be taken as to accent and so forth. But he has had a fair amount of experience at Fontainebleau and must have dealt with a lot of tourists. Anyway, nothing is easier to assume than a so-called American accent, though clothes and general style are a bit different. . ."

"Perfectly. . . The two men parted at the railway station ?"

"Yes. The square-built man in the mackintosh drove off, towards Paris. The other, described as tall and fat—not tall and thin—entered the Fontainebleau railway station and bought a ticket. He booked, first class, to Pont de Lyss."

Felix spoke meaningly, and Saturnin grunted.

"Pont de Lyss, eh ?"

"Yes. Doesn't that link up with your discoveries ? You found a map folded at the Pont de Lyss section, I understand. Also Alder's notes on the petrol consumption and distance covered in the Swedish Volvo would indicate Pont de Lyss as a possible destination for Chartrettes, eh ?"

"Possible—yes. We must be careful of a coincidence."

"There would have to be several, wouldn't there ? The Swedish Volvo observed within a couple of kilometres of the spot where Chartrettes was found dead. The motor-bike combination, hanging about a quiet village. The man who came, mysteriously, to meet the motor-cyclist. And it is necessary to explain how the murderer of Chartrettes got away, *n'est-ce-pas ?*"

"Yes. As a working hypothesis we may assume that the natives of Blaise saw the Swedish Volvo of Chartrettes pass through their street, and that it was driven by the murderer, with Chartrettes's dead body in the back of the car."

"Just so. Also an accomplice of the murderer was following on a motor-bike combination and picked up the murderer after he had dumped Chartrettes and the Swedish Volvo. I understand that you don't believe the kidnapping-gang really killed Chartrettes. The *Traitor* placard and so forth are false clues, what?"

"Well, there are difficulties," said Saturnin, carefully. "Before Edouard Lorrain was kidnapped, Chartrettes was already lying and concealing things. Why, if he did not mean to try blackmail? Besides, we know a good deal about Chartrettes. He was not the dangerous apache type."

"True. Then the theory is that Chartrettes went somewhere—probably to Pont de Lyss to blackmail certain people. People responsible for the murders at St. Remi. While Chartrettes has his interview with one criminal, an accomplice conceals himself in the back of Chartrettes' car. Isn't that the notion?"

"Provisionally, my boy."

"Good! That means Chartrettes parked his car. In some public parking place in Pont de Lyss. The criminals whom Chartrettes wished to victimize would know where he must park his car. So, not only does one criminal hide in the Swedish Volvo, but also he parks a motor-bike combination nearby. Chartrettes goes off, in the dark, not merely with one of his enemies concealed in his car, but the other enemy, the one he actually met, is following on the motor-bike. This, so that the murderer can get away after killing Chartrettes and leaving car and corpse in the forest."

"Yes. That's quite good. That is more or less what I had in my mind. It remains to be seen if we can trace the motor-cycle, and so forth. There's a lot of routine-work to be done, but we ought to get the man who killed Chartrettes."

Saturnin rose and walked over to his stove. He stood with his broad back to the blaze.

"Meanwhile we haven't been altogether idle, we others. We found the bullet that went into Chartrettes' back. It was fired by an automatic Colt. The diameter of the bullet is .251 of an inch."

"American, eh?"

"Yes."

"And the thirty thousand francs concealed in Chartrettes's car? It is the money we marked, eh?"

"Yes."

"But you still don't believe Chartrettes worked with a gang? Perhaps, though, he got connected some way? Suppose Guy Lorrain hired crooks to murder Stephane Prad, so that the wife would be widowed? Chartrettes, at St. Remi gets wind of this. He tries to blackmail Guy Lorrain. In fact he does so and is paid by Guy, the thirty thousand francs we marked for him. That

theory would account for Guy's sickness and recent drugging—and then Guy turns to his hired crooks again to liquidate Chartrettes."

"Desp'ite the fact that these same crooks have kidnapped Guy's father?"

"Well the crooks, too, would be interested in eliminating Chartrettes. This gang is also blackmailing Guy and don't want competition. Or, suppose this fellow, Neveux, hired the crooks? That's it! Why, Neveux has now practically got the whole bank in his hands. He looks a tough one! As soon as he was made a director he saw his chance of working with crooks, so that. . ."

"Wait! Wait!"

Saturnin put his hands to his head and held it tightly.

"You ought to be at Hollywood writing film-scenarios! Georges Alder is getting almost as bad. It's no good providing theories. That only means we shall start twisting facts to fit our theories. We must work on indisputable facts. The gun that shot Chartrettes was not used in the bank-cellar, on poor Albert Degray. So far the body of Edouard Lorrain has not turned up. Guv Lorrain was not implicated in the murder of Chartrettes, for the handsome Guy is still at the Passy nursing-home. A search of Chartrettes's office and flat provides no clue as to whom he was blackmailing, or with whom he was connected."

"Yes, but Paul Neveux has not been kept under observation, has he?"

"No. That's true. If we traced him to Pont de Lyss and found he hired a motor-bike combination, we'd have something to work on. Certainly he won't be forgotten. But the Mobile Brigade can't keep men shadowing half Paris."

"What about Chartrettes's secretary? The girl. She took his car from the garage and left it in the Rue Rossini, didn't she?"

"Yes. She has gone to London."

"To London?"

"To a married sister who lives there, in a suburb. We need not worry ourselves about Denise Megard. She doesn't fight with automatic pistols but with lip-stick and peroxide. The mother is a respectable *femme de ménage*. The sister in London is also respectable. Mother hopes that Denise, who has kicked over the traces a bit, will now settle down. The London sister's influence is considerable, and perhaps now Denise will remain permanently where she went only for a holiday. The girl is for nothing in this affair. Chartrettes told her nothing about his business."

"I see."

Felix rose and knocked out his pipe.

"Shall I go down to Pont de Lyss? Might hit on something? Where did Chartrettes park his car when he met his intended victim? Where does the intended victim live? Any flats and villas let recently to middle-aged, clean-shaven men with spectacles? And so on. I think I could dig up something."

"No doubt, my boy, but someone else must do the work. I want you here, in Paris."

"Yes. . . ?"

The Brigadier looked questioningly at his superior officer.

"I do," said Saturnin. "You have the entrée to the Estelle Prad household. I don't think it will be long before Guy Lorrain leaves Passy, fully recovered from his nervous shock. Then I shall be curious as to how he will behave, and how the bereaved Estelle will behave. You have heard nothing from your English friend, Miss Grace Talbot?"

"Nothing of consequence," Felix shrugged. "There's nothing much happened. Most of the servants are engaged. The house is fully furnished, though now and then, pieces are added."

"Well, well, we must wait. Meanwhile I want you in Paris. And so, I am quite certain, does the English Miss. What would she say to me if I were to send you down into. . ."

"Oh, don't talk rot," said Felix. "She's fifty, if she's a day."

"A most dangerous age," said Saturnin.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: HOUSE-WARMING

*"What he hit is history,
What he missed is mystery."*—THOMAS HOOD

MISS GRACE TALBOT with difficulty repressed a yawn, and over her cards glanced rather wistfully at Felix Norman. Miss Talbot hated playing bridge and she was almost inclined to think the evening had proved a disappointment. But really she could not blame herself. The house-warming had been well planned. The refreshments, both those supplied by Potin and those prepared by Ah Sing, the new Chinese cook, had been excellent. The band had played with verve and rhythm, and the larger *salon*, with the furniture removed, was perfect for dancing. Yet all the younger people had departed early, and only the "old fogeys" (half-heartedly Miss Talbot included herself in this category), had remained to talk wearisome politics, to munch and drink, and finally to set up two tables of bridge. It was not even worth while retaining the dance band. . . .

Miss Talbot sighed. She had hoped for something more exciting. She had spent three hundred francs to have her pale blue crepe *romaine* altered, and three hundred francs was a lot of money. It had been an extravagance and possibly a waste. Again Miss Talbot glanced over at Felix Norman, caught his eye and smiled. No, it had not been a waste of money. After all she really needed one or two decent evening frocks now, and the dances she had with young Mr. Norman had been most enjoyable. She must remember, by the way, that he was her nephew, over on a holiday from England. . . Really, he did look very much the Englishman, and his

accent was not too marked, especially since he stated he had spent half his life in France. Well, that was true, anyway. And he did not look a bit like a police-officer. Not like those one saw on the films, who were always shouting and bullying, and appeared literally to *eat* cigars."

At this point Miss Talbot played a heart instead of a diamond, and snatched back her card whilst her partner, Dr. Marcel Allard, muttered in his beard.

"I am so sorry," said Miss Talbot. "I can't see too well without my glasses. If you wish me to adhere to my first card played . . ."

"No, no. It is nothing" . . .

It was the Baronne Savella, a plump, good-natured woman who spoke. She partnered Felix Norman and was a newly-acquired friend of Estelle Prad's. The Baronne was chiefly distinguished by her diamonds, her extraordinarily-dyed red hair, and the mopping-up operations she had conducted at the cold buffet at midnight.

"Carry on," said Felix. "That's all right, Grace."

The game continued and Miss Talbot's splendid crimson flush gradually diminished as she fell back once more into the refuge of her thoughts . . .

Certainly she had been disappointed at the early break-up of the dancing. And really one must say that young people, to-day, were extraordinarily casual. They came to a party as though to a public gathering in an hotel, or a shilling hop! They did, and said just what they pleased; and they left the moment they were bored. Or soon after—for many had looked bored from the moment the dancing began. Of course it was nearing Christmas and there were a great many parties and entertainments being given . . . All the same, when Miss Talbot was a girl, one had a little more regard for one's host and hostess. Though perhaps after all one suffered needlessly, and behaved in a rather hypocritical fashion? The difficulty was, in these days, to discriminate between a welcome increase in frankness and a mere descent into brutal egoism. . . .

Miss Talbot sighed again. It was such a pity the band had gone. They had played some of the old tunes, as waltzes. *Lorsque tout est fini*, and *Tu ne sauras jamais*. They reminded Miss Talbot of her early days in Paris, before her father died, after the failure of that wretched bank . . . The English colony then had often got up dances, at some hotel near the Madeleine. There was a young man rather like Mr. Norman, who waltzed beautifully and had been out in the Argentine and could do the new tango that everyone was raving about. He taught Miss Talbot some of the steps, though they were very difficult. . . .

A metallic American voice came from the other bridge-table where a rubber had just concluded. The voice was that of Mr. Theodore Hacker, Estelle's father. Privately Miss Talbot blamed this old man for spoiling what might have been a delightful evening. Mr. Hacker had two days ago, announced his arrival in France, by a wireless message from the *President Jefferson*.

Esetelle herself had not appeared too pleased, but it was evidently impossible to put off the house-warming party, which was all arranged and the invitations sent out. But, naturally, Estelle was obliged to invite her father.

Miss Talbot mentally put things this way because it was so plain Estelle would rather her father had not come to the party. He was quite a domineering old man and Estelle longed now for her liberty and freedom from restraint.

Poor woman! She had suffered so much. The suicide of her faithless husband in such shameful circumstances . . . Miss Talbot felt that Estelle was entitled to a little compensatory pleasure. Of course she *had* turned to this young Guy Lorrain just a little quickly, after the tragedy. But then look how her husband had treated her . . .

And it seemed to Miss Talbot that Estelle was rather frightened of her father, or perhaps she did not wish to displease him because of his money. He was said to be immensely rich; and, though Estelle herself was well-to-do, no doubt she did not wish to lose what the old widower might soon leave her. Rich people usually wanted more, or so Miss Talbot imagined.

But certainly old Mr. Hacker had not added to the gaiety of the evening. He was rather a terrible old fellow. To poor Guy Lorrain he had been positively rude. He had argued hotly in favour of Free Masons with Dr. Allard, and, in fact, had disagreed with every view others advanced, doing so with a bluntness and intemperance seldom heard in French circles. Finally it was Mr. Hacker who had desired cards instead of dancing, and his audible comments and grumblings probably did a good deal to drive away the younger guests before they would otherwise have gone. . . .

Now he was still grumbling and holding one of those fatuous post mortems on Estelle's recent card-playing. The old, arrogant voice rang out, snubbing Guy Lorrain who tried to defend Estelle, and almost openly sneering at Paul Neveux who had declared he must leave for he had much work on hand and late nights meant lost efficiency.

Miss Talbot sighed again. The evening had really been almost a failure and chiefly because of this wretched, unsocial card-playing. One was actually glad to see the bridge-tables break up. Paul Neveux was going with the Baronne who had offered him a lift in her car. It was one in the morning. It would be quite nice to get into bed. Still it was a disappointment. . . .

* * * * *

Felix Norman, in his impeccable English evening clothes, stood before a wood fire with a whisky and soda. For some reason, which he had annoyingly left undefined, Commissaire Saturnin Dax had wished Felix to cultivate assiduously his "Aunt Grace", and the Estelle Prad household. "Get as close as you can, my boy," the Commissaire had said. "Go out for invitations to the house, if possible. And keep your eyes and ears open."

Actually the thing had proved very easy. Grace Talbot was one of those serenely efficient but lovable characters to whom most people take instinctively and instantly. Her trustworthiness and her good nature were written in every feature of her long, freckled face, and informed every accent of her speech. Estelle Prad had formed quite a friendship with her companion-secretary, and Felix, the so-called nephew, had first been accepted for sake of his "aunt" and had then won ground by his own qualities. In point of fact the susceptible Brigadier found it distinctly easy to make himself pleasant to the American widow. Estelle was a highly decorative person. With true American versatility and flair she could dress like a Parisienne, whilst her long-limbed, lithe figure was an asset few Parisiennes possess. Felix felt that such a woman as Estelle was completely thrown away on a tailor's dummy like Guv Lorrain—a man who wore lilac ties and smarmed his hair down with perfumed lotion! In fact, more than he realized, the Brigadier's eyes often conveyed such thoughts to the intelligent and experienced widow. He was gazing at her now, admiring her colouring set off by black velvet from Patou, and the grace of her walk as she crossed the room; he was about to fly to open the door for her when a harsh voice spoke in his ear.

"You're a Britisher, young fellow, aren't you?"

Theodore Hacker was polishing his pince-nez with a silk handkerchief and peering short-sightedly at Felix. The father of the hostess had secured the best position in front of the fire. Guv Lorrain and Dr. Allard were conversing a few yards away. Grace Talbot had followed Estelle from the room, the companion announcing that she would send some sandwiches, asked for by Mr. Hacker.

"My mother was English," said Felix, briefly.

"Is that so?" The old man put on his glasses and looked at the younger as though he were a museum exhibit.

"You don't talk English like a Britisher."

Felix felt inclined to return the compliment with a similar sort of remark, and to ask what Mr. Hacker's name had been originally, for certainly he was of an even more "East End of Europe" appearance than his beautiful daughter. However, Felix summoned a smile and faced the inquisition blandly.

"I have lived most of my life in France," he explained. "Like my aunt. Only her childhood was spent in her native country, whilst mine was not. It is in the first few years of one's life that one's speech is formed, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"That's so."

The old man nodded and caressed a thin, bony chin on which a large mole sprouted a few grey hairs. He made a sketchy attempt to pull down his white waistcoat which was too short and exposed some sort of band of grey flannel.

"Well, I don't blame you for living in France. It's a great country. I cross the Atlantic once a year and I generally visit London. But I don't like London. It's got more expensive now

than New York, and you don't get value for money. The food's awful. And the hotels and restaurants. I asked a waiter for iced water and he looked at me as if I'd gone hay-wire. I guess Estelle is wise to prefer Paris; but still, this isn't the place for a young woman on her own. I want her to return to New York with me, next month, and I'll be pinch-hitter for a woman chaperone. . ."

"Pinch-hitter? What is that?" said Felix.

Theodore Hacker laughed.

"You don't know our American phrases, eh? A pinch-hitter is a substitute I guess. A superior deputy for someone else. I wonder you don't pick up our slang, living here in Paris. Estelle will soon put you on to it. I tell her she uses it too much. It's all very well for. . . ."

The old fellow talked on whilst Felix pretended to listen. As an Englishman, in Paris on a holiday, Felix had been given a guest-room for this night of the house-warming. He was supposed to be a tourist, proceeding south to Cannes.

Meanwhile he obeyed Commissaire Dax's injunction and kept on the alert. Hacker's voice droned on. A silly, cynical man, he affected to despise and distrust almost everyone and everything. He would, no doubt, have described himself as a shrewd man of the world. Felix reflected that this wealthy old man was just the type to be victimized devastatingly by clever "con" men, if they ran across him.

So, as the other's voice rumbled in his ear, Felix nodded and smiled, but all his attention was elsewhere. Estelle was out of the room, but Grace Talbot had returned, with too much powder on her nose, and was telling Dr. Allard and Guy Lorrain about the accident she had two years ago whilst skating. The Chinese cook, Ah Sing, entered with a tray of sandwiches. The little man, with greying hair and impassive face, carried his tray to Grace Talbot.

"Egg sandwich, mademoiselle. Ham; beef and gherkin; tongue; sardine."

"Thank you, Ah Sing. Put them down, will you? I expect you want to get off to bed. Have the others gone?"

"Yes, all gone."

But Ah Sing was bent on doing his job thoroughly. He set his tray on one of the card tables, but he carried round the sandwiches, offering them first to Miss Talbot and then to Theodore Hacker.

"What's that you got there, boy? Gherkin? Say, d'you want to kill me! Beef and gherkins at one in the morning. . . . Sounds like a Chinese torture! Are you a Chink, or a Jap?"

"I am Chinese, sir."

"Well, I'll have one of those sardine sandwiches. And you might get me a glass of Evian water. Can do, eh?"

"Yes sir."

Ah Sing crossed the room again with his tray, and Felix was just about to light a cigarette, when there was a startling interruption.

From overhead came a stamping of feet. A great glass chandelier shook. Then there was a faint, feminine cry, and a crash, followed by a sound as of wood breaking, a drawer or cupboard being forced open.

"Hell! That's my daughter! What's going on?" said Hacker.

"Estelle!" cried Guy Lorrain. "She went upstairs . . ."

Felix had set down his glass on the mantel-piece. A wave of apprehension swept over the little company, whilst Dr. Allard and Grace Talbot made for the door.

"She went up to her room! Good Heavens. . . !"

"All right! Steady," said Felix.

He had gained the door before the others. Knowing the lay-out of the house he made straight for the stairs and the rest all followed him. Dr. Allard was hard on the Brigadier's heels, and Hacker followed. Guy Lorrain was next, whilst Grace Talbot and Ah Sing brought up the rear.

Felix ran lightly up the stairs to the first floor. The door of the room he knew to be Estelle Prad's was closed. There were indefinable, stealthy movements on the inside. Felix tried the handle and found the door was locked.

"Locked, eh?" said Dr. Allard. "Perhaps the key of the next room will fit. A moment. . . ."

The doctor went quickly to an adjoining "spare" bedroom, and pulled a key from the lock.

"I don't think that key will fit," said Miss Talbot.

"Don't waste time," cried Guy Lorrain, in a high-pitched, nervous tone. "She may be seriously hurt. Estelle! Estelle!"

They all listened, but there was no response from the woman. Yet there was a sound that Felix heard distinctly and recognized. It was the sound made by someone hastily and furtively opening a drawer.

"There's someone in there!" said Hacker. "Some thief. Say, you'd better force that door, young fellow. Can you manage it?"

For answer, Felix stepped back a pace, and threw all his weight at the door. It gave way and carried him inside. He heard the snap of a light bolt which had been pushed home on the inside but had given before his skilfully-applied strength. The next moment he was bending over Estelle Prad who lay on the floor in front of her dressing-table. Her face was white, her eyes closed, her body motionless. She was, however, alive.

"Estelle!" cried Hacker. "Ah! There's been a robbery! Some jewellery gone from her dress. Look at that table, too! The drawers have been forced. I reckoned I heard someone at 'em."

"*Seigneur Dieu!* Is she alive? Doctor! Doctor!"

Guy Lorrain was moaning and his eyes stared from out of a deadly white face. Dr. Allard remained calm, and was examining the unconscious woman, whilst Miss Talbot went quickly to a basin for water.

"Here, Ah Sing!" said Hacker. "Go 'phone the police! Hurry!"

Felix rose from his knees and his eyes swept round the room. His gaze met that of Grace Talbot, who had handed a glass of water to the doctor.

The lady stared for a moment at her supposed nephew; she blinked and caught her breath; then she marched resolutely to the one door of the room, and stood there, on guard. The thief who had knocked out Estelle Prad, taken her jewels and forced a drawer of the dressing-table, must be here, in the bedroom now. There had been no time for him to get out. Everyone had run up the stairs immediately after Estelle's cry and the sound of her fall. Sounds still came from the bedroom as Felix gained the top of the stair-case. Miss Talbot had heard these sounds as well as the Brigadier; including the sounds of drawers being forced open. And, besides audible evidence, the bedroom door had been within everyone's sight as they poured from the *salon* below. So, Miss Talbot kept her head, and as she stood squarely in the doorway, her eyes signalled urgently to Felix.

The Brigadier began a swift examination of the room. He opened a wardrobe, looked behind some clothes, and shut the door again. There was a curtained recess, also filled with clothes hanging on hooks, and this, too, the Brigadier thoroughly explored.

"She has been stunned by a blow on the head." Dr. Allard's voice came, with professional calmness. "It is not too grave. Assist me, please, to get her on to this sofa."

Guy Lorrain, his face twitching in a ghastly manner, was completely unstrung and useless. It was Hacker who helped lift his daughter to a couch. Miss Talbot remained grimly in the doorway. Her eyes were on Felix, who, having ascertained that both windows and shutters were closed and impassible, was testing the last possible place of concealment; this was the bed, and he turned back a heavy quilt, the sheets and blankets.

Theodore Hacker, straightening up from a sofa, saw what Felix was doing, and suddenly grasped the situation.

"Say!" he cried. "How the Heck was this job done? Where's the punk who knocked out poor Estelle? There's a diamond brooch missing from her dress, and some guy's bust open a drawer of that dressing-table. But where is he?"

"That is true."

Dr. Allard looked in astonishment around a room which afforded few places of concealment.

"You are right, Monsieur Hacker. And I heard sounds in the room even as I ran up the stairs. In fact, as I stood outside the locked door."

"So did I. So did I." cried Guy. "He must have gone out of the window. Or by the chimney."

"The windows and steel shutters are securely fastened on the inside. The chimney is quite impassible," said Felix. "I have

examined them thoroughly. Also the wardrobe, the recess for hanging clothes, and even the bed."

"And I have stood in this doorway all the time," asserted Miss Talbot.

"*C'est cocasse*," said the doctor. "But . . . it is incredible."

"Utterly," said Miss Talbot. "I do so agree."

"A secret passage," said Guy Lorrain. "One of the panels slides back . . ."

"Baloney," said Hacker, rudely. "What d'you think this is—a medieval chateau. There's no panels and secret passages in this dump."

"No. But then what has happened?" asked Miss Talbot. "How did the thief whom we heard in here as we gained the top of the stairs, get out of this room? We should have seen him, in any case, even if we had not heard him."

"*Seigneur Dieu!* There is some malevolent spirit," cried Guy. "I remember once, when I was a boy . . ."

"Bunk!" said Hacker. "Spirits nothing! Spirits don't hit a girl on the head with a black-jack, do they?"

"We had better search the house," suggested Dr. Allard. "I will remain here, and perhaps Miss Talbot will stay too. The rest had better search the house."

"Yes, yes. Come on."

Guy Lorrain turned towards the door, but Felix stopped him.

"An instant," said Felix. "I think it will be best for no one to leave this room at the moment. You had better all stay together. Mr. Hacker, didn't I hear you send the Chinese servant to telephone the police?"

"Yes. I certainly did. And he's taking his time over it, too."

"Perhaps . . .?" said Miss Talbot, and then stopped abruptly. Again a little wave of apprehension swept over the party.

"Something has happened to him, too!" cried Guy. "I tell you there's a malevolent spirit in the house. It doesn't matter whether houses are old or new. There's a poltergeist . . .!"

Only recently recovered from a bout of drug-taking, Guy Lorrain seemed to be on the point of collapse. Old Hacker ripped out an oath and made for the door. But he was stopped by Felix.

"A moment, please," said Felix.

His eyes went quickly to Grace Talbot and then he faced the others.

"I am a police-officer," he said. "I want you all to remain here for the moment. I will go downstairs to the telephone in the hall."

"A police-officer?" Guy Lorrain stared at Felix. "I thought you were English? I thought you were the nephew of Mademoiselle Talbot?"

Felix smiled at him.

"One can be English, and even the nephew of Mademoiselle, and still a police-officer," he said. "Please. I ask you to remain here whilst I telephone to headquarters."

He looked at Theodore Hacker and the old man nodded grimly.

"All right, young fellow. We'll all stop here and keep an eye on one another. I guess it's kind of lucky we've got a sleuth here to-night."

Felix went out, after yet another understanding glance at Miss Talbot. The Brigadier ran down the short staircase and into the hall. Here he stood quite still for a moment. The lights were on in the hall and they shone brightly upon another scene of violence. On a small table was a telephone instrument and the receiver hung down by its flex. On the black and white tiles of the hall lay a short, grey-haired man dressed in dark trousers and an immaculate white coat. It was Ah Sing, the Chinese cook. He lay prone, and he had been knocked out by a blow from some blunt instrument, even as Estelle Prad had been. A hat lay beside the man.

Felix replaced the telephone receiver, then quickly knelt to examine the Chinaman. The cook was breathing heavily with his eyes closed. After a moment Felix rose, went to the telephone, and called for a number.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: WAITING

"There is the Latin habit of discussing abstract ideas . . . This habit has nothing to do with knowledge or a desire to learn. It is more or less allied to the desire for eloquence."

—EZRA POUND

FELIX had telephoned to Saturnin Dax at Meudon, but it would take the Commissaire at least forty minutes to get to the Avenue Kleber. The time passed slowly for those who waited. Both victims of the outrage recovered consciousness within the first half-hour and were reported by Dr. Allard to be in no dangerous condition. In fact Ah Sing went away to his bed, his face as unemotional as though being knocked out were all in the day's work. Neither he nor Estelle Prad could describe the assailant, apparently both having been attacked from behind and taken completely by surprise. Ah Sing had been about to telephone when he was hit. Estelle had been standing before her dressing-table and looking into the mirror. She was unable to take things as phlegmatically as the cook, and little effort was made to press her now with questions.

So the remnants of the house-warming party just waited in the silent house with most of the lights burning. Upstairs Dr. Allard and Miss Talbot attended to Estelle Prad who lay, white-faced and shaky, upon her bed. Below, in the room where they had recently played bridge, Felix, old Hacker and Guy Lorrain discussed the baffling nature of the mystery: at least the other two discussed, whilst Felix gave himself up to silent thought.

"It's this way," said Hacker, for the twentieth time. "A fellow could get into the house and hide in Estelle's room. That's clear.

Then he knocks her out, either because she sees him hiding, or because he wants that diamond brooch on her dress, or simply because he reckons he can't get away without first silencing her. But, how in Heck does the guy get out of the room? Tell me that!"

The old man looked at Felix, who said nothing.

"I heard Estelle call out. We all heard her fall, and then steps, up in the room there. We were out and half way up the stairs in three seconds. We had that bedroom door under our eyes. And the door was locked, and bolted on the inside. Say, it doesn't make sense!"

Theodore Hacker picked up a plate of egg-sandwiches and began to attack them, vigorously, but in an abstracted manner.

"It's crazy!" he said.

"That's it! It is not natural."

Guy Lorrain was pacing restlessly up and down the thickly-carpeted floor.

"I tell you this is a poltergeist case. There are many such cases. Furniture flung about. Things thrown out of the windows. Noises in the dark, and actual violence."

"Aw, apple sauce!" said Hacker, his voice sour, though muffled by egg-sandwich. "That stuff doesn't belong to-day."

"It belongs to any day, sir," said Guy, shrilly. "There are well authenticated cases. Houses that no one can live in. Houses where things like this happen. People knocked down and injured, and no one to be seen! How, otherwise, can you account for the phenomena we have just witnessed. Estelle struck down and no one in her room. Ah Sing also knocked senseless in the hall, and yet no one has passed out of Estelle's room; no one is to be seen anywhere. It is the poltergeist. I tell you Estelle must leave this house. It is haunted!"

"Yeah? And so those bogeys of yours take a woman's jewels? Do they break open drawers in a dressing-table? Talk sense. There must be some explanation, and it's up to the police to find it."

Hacker looked maliciously at Felix.

"Unless they believe in bogeys, too!"

Felix was about to reply when Dr. Allard entered the room. The doctor had in his hand a key which he held out to Felix.

"I have found the key of the room, Monsieur. It was under a radiator in a corner, and looked as though it had been thrown there. Perhaps a thief locked the door himself and threw the key away. It is a very queer business!"

He handed the key to Felix, who put it into his pocket.

"How is Estelle?" asked Guy Lorrain.

"She is recovering. Fortunately her hair affords her considerable protection, especially at the back of her head where she was struck. I imagine with some blunt instrument, a club or truncheon."

The doctor crossed to a table and helped himself to some soda water.

"I will remain in the house to-night, Monsieur Hacker," he said. "Not that either of to-night's victims are in a dangerous condition. I have taken another look at the cook, and he declares that he feels no bad effects. I have left him sleeping in his bed. The other servants heard nothing of our tragedy. The two housemaids were asleep. The parlour maid was washing her hair. The servants' wing is a little remote anyway."

Hacker laughed.

"Been playing the sleuth, Doc? I guess whoever did this job it wasn't any maid. Here's the question: how did the thief get out of that room whilst we were just outside and the door was locked and bolted. The windows and even the shutters were fastened. The chimney is out of the question. You're a scientist, Doc. What's your theory?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" The little doctor shrugged. "I have no explanation, Monsieur Hacker. I fear that a scientific training does not help me. I heard noises within that room after Madame had been knocked senseless. She did not make the sounds I heard. So there was someone else in the room. A thief—for a drawer is forced and jewels have certainly left the room. Yet our young friend here, who is a police-officer, searched the room under our eyes, whilst we were all in the room. *C'est cocasse!*

"Poltergeist," said Guy Lorrain. "That's the only possible explanation. I, too, will stay here tonight. But not by myself. There are double-bedded spare rooms . . . Dr. Allard, I should like to share a room with you, if you don't mind. Not that I am likely to sleep in this awful house. I feel as though I should never sleep again. This sort of thing is terribly bad for me. Terribly!"

He went over to a sideboard and splashed some brandy from a decanter into a glass. Old Hacker eyed him unlovingly.

"Yeah? Is that so, young man? Well it ain't exactly good for my daughter either."

"That will be all right, Monsieur Lorrain," said the doctor, formally. "We will remain here, together, if you wish it. There is not likely to be much sleep for any of us. Already it is two o'clock and the police will have many questions to put to us when they arrive."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: PRESTIDIGITATOR OR POLTERGEIST?

*But now some lamp awakes,
And, with the venom of a basilisk's wink,
Burns the dark winds. Who comes?*

—THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES.

"Now, my boy." Saturnin Dax sat in an armchair in the bedroom placed at Felix's disposal. The Commissaire had close to his hand a large cup of black coffee which the efficient Miss Talbot

had conjured from nowhere whilst Saturnin was questioning and probing.

"Now, my boy. I think I had better have most of it, all over again, from your point of view. I'll pull you up when I've enough of any particular feature."

Saturnin dropped five lumps of sugar into his coffee and felt for his cigarettes. Felix sat on the edge of his virginal bed and began to speak in low tones. The house was silent and from outside there came an occasional hoot of an automobile. The Brigadier filled his great pipe.

"The evening, from a social point of view, was a wash-out. Right from the start. A young crowd came, and the idea was to have a dance. But there was a bit of a clique, and they wanted to get off somewhere else. Got bored, and left before midnight. It was partly Estelle's fault. She rather neglected her guests and had a private petting party with Guy Lorrain."

"Indeed ?"

"She seems to be crazy about him. Though what she can see . . . Well, never mind that. Her father, old Hacker, arrived in Paris, two or three days ago. Came on the *President Jefferson*. He doesn't like dancing. He doesn't like Frenchmen, not even Guy. The old boy doesn't much like the whole damned human race. He says so, too. Loudly. He tolerates cards—bridge—as long as it's sufficiently dull. He clamoured for a game, and got it. A bridge of sighs. If any man could kill a young people's party it is Theodore Hacker, citizen of the United States, and originally from Frankfurt or Prague, or what have you. A child of the ghetto, unless I'm much mistaken. He talks about money, and how many automobiles are contained in different American cities. What his name was originally Jehovah only knows, but . . ."

"All right. I see you've suffered under Monsieur Hacker, my boy. We shall skip him. I have, in any case, seen his passport and papers. Now! The dancing broke up about midnight. The young folk escaped, for frolic in some more lively environment. Mr. Hacker insisted on cards, and got his way. Perhaps he wished to check what you describe as the 'petting' between his daughter and Guy Lorrain. Anyway, there were two tables of bridge, after dancers and band had gone *n'est-ce-pas* ?"

"Yes. Grace Talbot and I played at one table with Dr. Allard and a Baronne Savella, whose husband seems to be a millionaire financier, now abroad somewhere. At the other table were Estelle, her father, Guy Lorrain and Paul Neveux."

"The servants had all gone to bed, except the Chinese cook, Ah Sing ?"

"That's so. According to Grace Talbot. I can't answer for it myself."

"Then Neveux went off, after a rubber ; with the Baronne in her car."

"Yes. Again, I can't be quite certain that . . ."

"But I think I can, my boy. Neveux has been under observation since the murder of Chartrettes. That's all right. What about the victimised but distinctly taciturn Oriental?"

"Grace Talbot engaged him. She speaks very highly of Ah Sing. A wonderful cook. Was with English friends of hers for sixteen years, here in Paris. First-rate references and honesty unimpeachable, Grace says. I think in such cases she knows exactly what she's talking about."

"Good."

Saturnin finished his coffee and lit a fresh cigarette.

"In any case," suggested Felix. "Not even a Chinese prestidigitator could contrive to knock himself senseless, with a blow delivered at the back of his head. And he was knocked out all right, trust me."

"I do, my boy. But it would seem that prestidigitators have actually been at work here. If not thaumaturgists. You are all agreed on that. Dr. Allard is a shrewd observer, and not one who in an emergency will lose the north. Your Grace, too; and old Hacker: I think that, besides your excellent trained self, we have in the house some uncommonly reliable witnesses. Which is a bit of luck. Yet you all agree that sounds came from the bedroom, where Estelle Prad was certainly lying unconscious, even as you approached the door. Indubitably Madame Prad was knocked out, just like her cook. Indubitably at least one piece of jewellery left that bedroom."

"Yes. A tortoise in diamonds. I saw it, plainly enough, on the corsage of her black velvet gown. Looked pretty valuable. And drawers were burst open. I heard the sound, as I was nearing the bedroom door, and after Estelle had fallen. The door was locked and bolted on the inside by a light bolt. No doubt about that. The key seems to have been thrown across the room. No weapon found, near Estelle or Ah Sing. But who knocked out the Chink, by the telephone? Were there two crooks? Even then, how did Estelle's assailant get out of a virtually sealed room? Perhaps there's something after all in Guy Lorrain's notions about the poltergeist. There's simply no rational explanation, however you look at it."

Saturnin smiled.

"Reminds one of the Sandra Menendez affair, eh? A body in a room supposed to be locked, and, as you put it, sealed."

Felix flushed at a tender and painful memory.

"Quite so. But in that case the door was not locked at all. An accomplice of the murderess arrived first at the door, pretended it was locked, knocked in a panel, fiddled with inside bolts, and deceived us—for a time. But here, in this case, I myself arrived first at the door. I heard movements within. For that matter, so did Dr. Allard, Grace Talbot and Hacker. And they are reliable witnesses. There had been absolutely no time, between Estelle's cry and fall and my running up the stairs, for her assailant to . . ."

"Yes, yes. I get all that, my boy. The door was locked and bolted. Miss Talbot stood guard, whilst you searched . . ."

The Commissaire rose and began silently to pace the room. Despite the central heating he had neglected to take off his overcoat or even his scarf. His hands were plunged in the pockets of his open coat. "You burst open the door, breaking that light bolt. I suppose you went straight to the unconscious woman, eh ?"

"Yes. I did. Dr. Allard was just behind me. We bent over Estelle at the same time. For my part I just verified the fact that she really was senseless. The doctor's examination was, of course, expert and sufficiently detailed. I was looking for a weapon, or any other possible clue. Grace Talbot kept cool and got water, but without of course leaving the bedroom. There's a basin and running water, as you saw for yourself. Guy Lorrain stood in the middle of the room, like a helpless cretin, just making a moaning noise. He is near a break-down, I fancy. Between dope and love-making he is altogether in a state! "

"And Miss Talbot entered the room last ?"

"She or Ah Sing. At first, everybody came in a crowd and huddled round Estelle, until the doctor told them to give her air. But Grace acted with tremendous presence of mind. She realised that the criminal must be concealed in the room and she kept her eyes open. In fact she stuck in the doorway itself, though that was not necessary. The room is not so large . . . One of us must have seen anyone moving about, anyone who, for example, tried to slip away, from recess or wardrobe . . . No. It's a poltergeist! The handsome, dashing Guy is right. The Sandra Menendez case was simple, in comparison. As you said at the time, there could be only one explanation."

Saturnin grinned.

"I rather spread myself, didn't I ? I think I said that the more utterly inexplicable a problem appeared the fewer solutions there could be to the problem. Well, it's the same here. Never having encountered a poltergeist I shall reserve my belief in such a creature until we are formally introduced. Someone got into Madame Prad's room—which would not be difficult—and knocked her senseless, and stole some jewellery. Then someone got out of the room whilst six of you were there, just outside the door or actually in the room, and that certainly was difficult. However it was done. But depend on it, my boy, the solution of the problem will surrender to hard thinking."

The Commissaire produced from one capacious pocket a soft grey hat. "You saw this, of course ?"

"Yes," said Felix. "It was beside Ah Sing, as he lay unconscious in the hall. I supposed it was his hat. Don't you think it is ?"

"Perhaps."

Saturnin returned the hat, rather crushed, to his pocket.

"It was Dr. Allard who found the key of the bedroom door, eh ?"

"Yes. He said he discovered it under a radiator. It looks as though the criminal locked the door on Estelle and then threw the key across the room."

"He bolted the door, too. And he did these things without being seen by the lady, or so she says . . ."

Saturnin paused in his noiseless pacing of the thick carpet.

Suddenly he stiffened, put a finger to his lips, and crossed to the light-switch. Felix rose from the bed as the room was plunged into darkness.

The bedroom door had opened silently under the skilled hand of the Commissaire, and the faintest streak of some indefinable illumination showed a difference between room and passage.

Saturnin put his lips close to the Brigadier's ear.

"Someone came down the stairs. Now in the hall. Slipping out of the house. We must follow."

From downstairs came the faintest sound of a metal chain and then a bolt. The sound of a motor horn came with startling loudness from the never-sleeping streets. The front door of the house had opened and silently closed.

"Now!" said Saturnin.

With amazing lightness, considering his bulk, the Commissaire ran on his toes downstairs to the front door. Felix followed, after snatching his overcoat from its peg behind the door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: EAST MEETS WEST.

*"And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight."*

—MATHEW ARNOLD.

OUTSIDE in the Avenue Kleber it was bitterly cold. A heavy arc-lamp swung in the wind which whistled along the wide pavement turning leaves, paper, and light rubbish into gliders and parachutes. For a moment Saturnin and Felix stood in the shadows of a doorway watching a short, vigorous figure in overcoat and bowler hat that walked rapidly away in the direction of the Place de l'Etoile.

"Looks like Ah Sing!" whispered the Brigadier.

"It is," agreed Saturnin. "The man of unimpeachable character. Come on."

He moved from the shadows in the direction taken by the Chinese cook. A man came from a neighbouring doorway and saluted Saturnin.

"The Chinaman, Commissaire," he reported. "Seemed excited. Muttering to himself."

"All right. Good man! Remain here."

"Yes, Commissaire. There's a police-car across the road, with . . ."

No more was said for a roving taxi had come into the Avenue

and was being hailed by Ah Sing. The taxi was turning round and crossing the road at the summons. Saturnin went across to where his sharp eyes had detected the police-car standing, without lights, beneath a tree. In the driver's seat was an *agent* in plain clothes who saluted as his two superior officers arrived.

"Follow that taxi."

The Commissaire jumped into the back of the car followed by Felix.

"*Sapristi!* What a wind! What a dog's *métier!* Why choose it? There are decent livings to be gained, as a deep-sea diver, a steeple-jack, a whaler. Nice, comfortable, comparatively easy jobs. Why choose to be a policeman? Sheer morbidity, my boy. Masochism. That's what it is."

"The Commissaire went on like this for some time, winding the scarf more elaborately round his neck, turning his collar higher and buttoning it. Felix knocked out his calabash and put it into the pocket of his light overcoat. He wore no hat, but he had a silk scarf which he draped rather inadequately over his white shirt and low-cut, backless waistcoat.

"Surely you don't feel cold?" he said.

"No. The word is pitiful! Meaningless. And always these cars are glacial. With a current of air to cut off one's head. You know why? The younger police officers seek promotion. Yes! They cannot arrive by brains so they will kill off their superiors by chicane. Older men shall be dragged from their beds at dawn. They shall be put in draughty cars. . . ."

"He's turned into the Avenue Marceau, Commissaire," announced the driver stolidly. "Seems to be heading for the river."

"Naturally!" Saturnin groaned. "The river. Delightful! An open boat, I dare say. Bah! Why do we cling to life?"

He shook a packet of cigarettes and picked one out with his lips.

"That Chinaman," said Felix reflectively, "is wearing a bowler hat."

Saturnin chuckled. He spoke in almost a happy tone.

"You noticed that. Good! Does he then have two hats? A soft grey and a black hard hat? So your mind works, does it not? Why should a cook possess so many different kinds of headgear. But why not? He earns good money. And then he is an Oriental. A Chinaman. They exalt formalism to the highest of arts *n'est-ce-pas?* Probably the cook is a Confucian. Perhaps he would wear one sort of hat for telephoning, and another for visiting the police. Even a third kind for making a nocturnal escape. Who shall say to what degree a ceremonious dress and deportment"

"Don't talk rot!" growled Felix. "There he was, lying, knocked out beside the 'phone. The soft grey hat was just beside his head. I suppose I should have looked into it. I did wonder how he managed to find the time to fetch the hat."

"Aha!"

"Yes. Obviously he couldn't have had time to go upstairs, four floors to his room. But he's the chief servant. A sort of butler as well as cook, I think. He is in charge of the maids, even the parlour-maid. And these fellows generally have some sort of pantry, downstairs, off the kitchen. . . ."

"Where Ah Sing would naturally keep his battery of hats. One for soup, another for vegetables, a third for the entree. Yes, yes. One sees the point. But his hair is greying and he uses some curiously smelling oil. Moreover, his hats—that bowler, for example—are French. I examined it in his bedroom. Ah Sing has lived for the last thirty years in France. But this grey hat is of English make. It was bought in Liverpool."

"I noticed that," said Felix. "But Ah Sing was in service with English people."

"Aha! A delicate feeling of loyalty would therefore make him wear English hats? Would send him to Liverpool for them? Or his English employer takes the same size in hats and gives them away to the cook, the same wealthy employer paying as much as five shillings for such a specimen as I have in my pocket, eh? By the way, the bowler cost a good deal more. It smelt of oil, but the grey one does not."

Felix flushed and swore ruefully.

"I should have spotted it, of course."

Saturnin slapped the younger man's knee.

"You had your hands full. You wanted to get back to the room upstairs. There was too much for one man to look after."

"All the same . . ." Felix was mollified. "I should have thought more about the hat. I suppose it means Ah Sing had an accomplice. There was a row, eh? And the other fellow knocked out the Chink? But still the main mystery stands. How did Estelle's assailant get out of that room?"

Saturnin grunted and banged his gloved hands together.

"For my part," he said, again in bitter tones, "I doubt whether even such an interesting problem will occupy me for long. Not in this world. But no doubt there is a Hell for commissaires of police. Some place where they must travel, before dawn, along the interminable banks of icy rivers, passing the cafés, with their stoves, coffee and hot grogs. . . ."

He groaned and lit a fresh cigarette without removing his gloves.

For some moments there was silence whilst the police-car, following the taxi, sped along the shining, deserted quays. On their right hand patches of light mist shifted in the breeze, changing the dim perspective like transposed pieces of a jig-saw moved by some giant, invisible hand. Now and then a booming siren came from the distant darkness, a menace as well as a warning.

"By the way," said Felix reflectively. "According to Pierre Degray and those fellows at the Café du Théâtre there was some kind of Oriental concerned in the bank robbery and connected with the Rollas."

Saturnin grunted.

"Do you think Ah Sing is an associate of those crooks? Of the man who got out of the bank vault?"

Saturnin grunted again, but more feebly.

"It's queer," said Felix. "It was Grace who hired Ah Sing. And she answered for his honesty. She doesn't often make mistakes—not in that sort of thing. Besides, Ah Sing has good references, which were examined and taken up. Do you think . . . ?"

"Think!"

Saturnin groaned deeply. He lay back, his head low in coat collar and muffler like the head of a tortoise.

"My poor wife! And what will happen to my children?"

His eyes closed and he groaned again. Felix, however, despite the pathos of the situation, flushed with annoyance. He knew perfectly well that his superior officer had seen things and imaginatively realized things missed by his own immaturity. Felix also knew that, whilst Saturnin would reveal any and every fact he discovered, he would hold back implications drawn from facts, plausible theories and conjectures. Again and again in their years of association Saturnin had evaded direct questions. It was partly from vanity, for the Commissaire had a comedian's sense of the dramatic and liked to spring a complete surprise with maximum effect. But also Felix knew the manœuvring was for his own good and his own instruction. He possessed the facts. He had the advantage inasmuch as the recent drama had been enacted under his nose. Nevertheless, the older man had seen or guessed most. It was a little humiliating. What had the Commissaire surmised? What was the significance of the soft, grey hat, seemingly not Ah Sing's, and found beside him, close to the telephone? Surely the cunning old Commissaire had not solved the problem of how Estelle's assailant had got out of the sealed room?

The very conception of this made Felix sit up quickly and look with suspicion at his neighbour. Saturnin, however, seemed to be asleep, or dead. His eyes were closed and his great bulk was motionless. Yet a moment later he had leaned forward quickly and was speaking to the driver. Ah Sing's taxi was slowing down, and now halted.

The Chinaman was alighting.

"Pass him quickly," said the Commissaire. "Get into the shadows beyond; then stop."

"He's keeping his taxi," said Felix. "Looks as though he's visiting that ship."

They were, in fact, on the Right Bank and had arrived close to the Ile de la Cité. Here there was a certain amount of life and movement despite the hour. Somewhere a tug hooted with an impudent, bad-tempered whoop. Some market-carts, built up high above their wheels, rumbled over the *pavé*. Small *cafés* not only showed lights but held a numerous, active clientèle.

"Right! This will do."

The *agent* had halted the other side of a widening in the road, which, in fact, widened out to a place or square. Thirty yards away Ah Sing could be seen walking towards a ship. She was small and looked excessively dirty, with one thin smoke-stack and few lights. Some planks made a rough gangway from decks to quay, with a rope at one side for a rough handrail and a dim lantern flickering over the greasy planks.

"In a minute or two," said Saturnin to his chauffeur, "you will drive over to where the taxi is parked and remain there. Come on, my boy."

The Commissaire's grip on life appeared now sufficiently adequate, and even robust. He made his way rapidly across the wide, cobbled quay, his eyes fixed upon the little figure of the Chinaman, who went, unhesitatingly, up the gangway and aboard the ship.

"She looks like a collier," said Felix, excitedly. "Seems to be no one at the gangway; in fact, no one on her decks."

Ah Sing had crossed the slippery planks unchallenged. He now disappeared in the deep shadows of a gangway.

"Good!" grunted Saturnin.

Without hesitation he went quickly up the gangway, followed by the Brigadier. The decks could now be seen thick with coal-dust. The gangway was placed forward and two Chinamen were sitting on the forecastle-head seemingly engaged in a quiet but intense argument. They took no notice of the police-officers, who paused as they gained the decks. There was silence broken only by far-off city night-sounds and the queer, guttural gabble of the Chinamen. There were odours of varied and subtle admixtures: a smell of damp coal from a partly-open hatch, of exotic cooking from a galley in the shadows, the pleasant tang of tarred rope and salt, the not-so-pleasant odour of paint.

Saturnin moved cautiously towards where some cabins showed amidships.

"Watch your step, milord," he said softly. "May be an open coal-hole. And you in *smoking*, too! Is there no officer and no watch on this sacred tub?"

He cursed as he picked his way amid coal débris and a litter of rope-ends, paint-pots, and shapeless, undefined objects.

"No discipline. Officer of the watch keeping it in one of those cafés over there. I wonder . . ."

What the Commissaire was about to "wonder" was never articulated, for at that moment a most violent and extraordinary turmoil broke out only a few yards away. High screeches, passionate gasps, a squealing and gibbering as of strange jungle beasts in a frenzied death-grip. It broke suddenly and ceased. It was followed by a crash and a narrow but bright beam of illumination in a hitherto darkened alleyway. A cabin door had opened. A bowler hat came bouncing and curvetting like a drunken

saltimbanque across the deck-planks. And, after the hat, two locked and fighting figures.

"Good!" said Saturnin, coolly.

He strode up to the pair of figures and seized one unceremoniously by the slack seat of his pants. This man, struggling in furious impotence, the Commissaire held up as one might hold a kitten. The other combatant was gripped by the Brigadier: this was Ah Sing, but he made no attempt to struggle.

In the light that came from the cabin Felix could see the reddened, enraged face of Ah Sing's antagonist. This was a Chinaman. He was larger and taller, but not unlike Ah Sing—at least to the eye of an inexperienced European.

"Let me down!" he cried in English. "Let me down!"

"Certainly," said Saturnin, gravely. "Let us go into the cabin, Brigadier!"

Chinaman in hand, as though carrying a parcel, the Commissaire entered the cabin. Felix followed with the passive, unresisting Ah Sing

"Shut the door, my boy."

Felix shut the door. There was a key in the brass lock and the Brigadier locked the door, put the key in his pocket and his back to the door. When he turned Felix saw that Saturnin had in his hand a short but ugly-looking life-preserver evidently taken from the unknown Chinaman.

"What right?" said this worthy, furiously. "Who you belong? How you come ship-side?"

He burst into a stream of Chinese, glaring at Ah Sing, who said nothing.

"Be quiet a minute," said Saturnin.

He pushed the voluble speaker on to a settee which ran down at one side of the fairly spacious cabin. There was a bunk, a desk, the usual tip-up basin, and a porthole covered by a dark curtain. There were photographs stuck up on the bulkheads, and a glance or two around this comfortable cabin convinced Felix that the unknown Chinaman was no ordinary sailor. A chief steward, probably. Perhaps he "found" the ship. Made good money. But where did he come in amidst all this confusion?

Saturnin, meanwhile, was moving coolly about. He had opened a desk and was looking at a passport.

"Leave that. What right?"

The unknown Chinaman crossed swiftly to the Commissaire.

"Charlie Sing, eh?" said Saturnin. "Chief steward. And the brother of Ah Sing, I presume?"

"Belong my pigeon. Leave that?"

"Yes?"

Saturnin looked swiftly at Ah Sing, who stood perfectly still with his head hanging and a curious look of shame and mortification on his face.

"Your brother, Ah Sing?" Saturnin asked in French.

"Yes, monsieur."

The Commissaire nodded.

"Well, Charlie, I am of the police. Commissaire Dax."

"What! Police!"

Charlie's face went very white.

"What's that to me? What trouble? Not my pigeon?"

"Very interesting."

Systematically the Commissaire was searching the desk, and now he moved about the cabin. He examined the bunk, lifted the sofa of the settee and felt beneath. He looked at soap and toothpaste. He let down the tip-up basin. Finally he pulled from underneath this basin the tin container made to catch dirty water. This can was half-filled with opaque, soapy water. Saturnin carefully poured it out into the basin. A little sack of waterproof silk was revealed: when opened the Commissaire held in his hands a brooch of diamonds formed in the shape of a tortoise and a valuable-looking plaque of diamonds and emeralds.

"Get your hat and coat, Charlie," said Saturnin, quietly.

The man now had nothing to say whatever. White-faced and trembling, he took an overcoat from a cupboard built into the bulkhead. He paused, looking at an empty shelf; his little slits of eyes darted towards the Commissaire.

"Your hat, Charlie? You left it in the Avenue Kleber. Here you are."

Saturnin pulled the grey, soft hat from his pocket. He set it on the head of Ah Sing, where it rested, absurdly small; he placed it on the brother's head and it fitted.

"All right, my boy, let's go."

Felix unlocked the door of the cabin and the two Frenchmen and two Chinamen passed out. Ah Sing was still silent and seemed overwhelmed with shame. The brother, Felix held by the arm, whilst Saturnin locked the cabin door and pocketed the key.

The little procession of police officers and captives left the ship with as little fuss and notice as they had boarded her. The two sailors on the forecastle still argued intensely; there was still no watch on the gangway.

Arriving back on the quay, the police-car was seen parked alongside Ah Sing's taxi. The plain-clothed agent was smoking a cigarette with the taxi-driver.

Saturnin put Charlie into the back of the police-car, but Ah Sing hung back.

"Where would you take me, monsieur?" he whispered. "No, no!"

He gave a curious laugh, a sign in China of extreme embarrassment.

"Please, monsieur!"

Saturnin looked at him reflectively for a moment.

"If I let you go, will you return, straight away, to the Avenue Kleber? And will you remain there all the time until you have my permission to do otherwise?"

"Yes, yes, monsieur!"

"Word of honour?"

"Word of honour, monsieur."

"All right, Ah Sing. You may go."

Ah Sing went gladly to his taxi. Saturnin gave the key of the ship's cabin to the *agent*, and motioned Felix to the driver's seat of the police-car. After receiving instructions the *agent* walked away quickly towards the ship.

Ah Sing's taxi was turning, its wheels throwing up mud amid the *pavé*.

"Here! You let my brother go. He steal. He very bad man!"

"Really?"

Saturnin entered the car and sat beside his prisoner.

"What for you take me only? What for?"

"Just because we like you, Charlie," said Saturnin. "All right, Felix, my boy. Close that window. There's a formidable current of air!"

Felix started up the car in a considerable turmoil of thought. He was saying to himself:

"Why has he let Ah Sing go? The cunning old devil! I think he can see already exactly what happened."

Fortunately the Brigadier had only a very short distance to drive, otherwise in his agitation he might have crashed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: A CHAIR ON THE BOULEVARDS

"They who dream by day are cognisant of many things which escape those who dream only by night."—EDGAR ALLAN POE

SATURNIN DAX sat in a very comfortable armchair on the Boulevard des Italiens. The chair was provided by a world-famous firm who made gramophones and gramophone records. Seated at his ease in a warmed and spacious room, the Commissaire, earphones on head, listened to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. This place with its music was a favourite resort of Saturnin, and the room a cloistered isle of sweet, chosen sound where the jaded or baffled spirit might find refuge, creeping like some hard-pressed outlaw of medieval times from the rude, crowded streets into hallowed precincts of sanctuary.

Saturnin was at rest. He had not slept; in fact he had passed a night of considerable activity, yet he looked fresh. His brown, mahogany jaw was scrupulously shaven, the moustache silken. He had taken two breakfasts, one at five and another at half-past eight, (an *omelette au lard*, a foot or two of bread, some honey, coffee), and, though it was now past ten, he did not, strangely enough, feel hungry. No; his soul was at rest. In his ears and all through his large body poured harmony.

NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE

There were of course problems. But they would surrender to hard thinking. That did not mean forcing the pace. Saturnin was experienced. He knew how to let the sub-conscious do its share. The sub-conscious and Bach. Music and reflection. Emotion recollected in tranquillity. A pity Ah Sing would not speak, though it was just barely possible he knew nothing, or next to nothing. Charlie, too, remained obstinately silent—for the moment. He might be persuaded to change his mind. There was plenty of evidence piling up against Charlie. He was fired from his ship and had concluded his last voyage with the company. Opium-smuggling, the skipper had said. Might be more to it than that. Anyway, Charlie's fingerprints were on the smashed drawer in Estelle Prad's dressing table. And hidden in his cabin was some of the lady's jewellery. That would need explaining. A lot of explaining. . . .

Saturnin lit a cigarette, striking a match soundlessly. There were few people at this early hour in the gramophone parlour. A bored attendant, in chocolate-brown uniform, moved about. He supplied *jetons* to put in the machines; he offered money-change or other service to clients. The Commissaire sighed voluptuously. Peace, within two metres of the pavements and storm and shock of traffic. Peace and harmony It would be pleasant, of course, to discover how that animal got out of a locked room, but . . .

The flowing, clean-cut, delightful music poured on. The *Italian Concerto* played on a harpsichord. It flowed, it soared, it built an edifice at once intellectual and emotional; a marble palace, incredible yet real, towering impossibly yet continuing to tower; a pleasure-dome such as Coleridge's great Khan could not decree; a dream of hashish come true, with utter and complete satisfaction to body and spirit; and no aftermath of poisoned regret . . . This third movement Saturnin always adored. It came like a burst of sunshine into a forgotten "distressed area"; the joy of an age that knew and appreciated joy; an epoch that shunned sentimentality and molasses, that lived hard, disciplined itself, thought clearly; the great Eighteenth Century.

Saturnin sighed. The music had stopped. It had not fussed and meandered pretentiously; it had just stopped, having arrived at the fit ending. Saturnin stared absently, still living in the music of another age. Only slowly and reluctantly did he rouse himself. And then only slightly. Another piece, perhaps? Something shorter. A *morceau* by Scarlatti . . . ?

A brown coat brushed past the Commissaire's chair. He stretched out his hand.

"My friend" he began.

And then he stopped, and his hand fell back. A young man, with long dark hair and a pale face was passing to the next seat. He wore an overcoat of chocolate-brown. He had not noticed Saturnin's words or gesture. Fortunately, for this was not the uniformed and obliging attendant. Saturnin had made a mistake.

He rose now quickly to his feet. His eyes were staring straight before him and his lips moved without sound. Absently he picked up his hat, gloves, and fat yellow cane. He put on his hat, and wound the muffler around his neck.

"Thunder of God!" he muttered. "Of course!"

More briskly now he made towards the door. The great clock over the Credit Lyonnaise across the street indicated that it was nearly eleven. A smartly dressed woman was entering the gramophone parlour with two excited children whose voices she tried to subdue. As he neared the door Saturnin caught sight of his reflection thrown back at him, full length, from a great wall-mirror. He paused and raised his hat. He spoke with cold deliberation.

"Monsieur le Commissaire Dax, you are an imbecile. A blind imbecile. Good day!"

He replaced his hat, and left the shop. The smart young mother and two children broke into hysterical laughter whilst music-lovers glared at them.

CHAPTER THIRTY: RECONSTRUCTING A CRIME

"The mind sits terrified at the objects she has magnified herself, and blackened: reduce them to their proper size and hue, she overlooks them."—LAURENCE STERNE

"Now, I will repeat that," said Saturnin Dax. "It is all simple enough, but I want it to be quite clear in your minds. Madame Prad is upstairs in her room, immediately overhead. She has agreed to play the part I ask her and I want you to do the same. She will cry out. A stamping noise will be made on the floor above; then you will run upstairs, and—well, act just as you did when the real tragedy occurred at about one o'clock this morning. Agreed. . . ?"

He looked round at them with a smile. Miss Talbot had flushed cheeks and shining eyes as though there were no thirty-five years between her and her school days. Guy Lorrain sat, biting his nails. Dr. Allard, old Hacker, and Felix Norman were keen-eyed and wary. Ah Sing had resumed with his white coat the aplomb of a well-trained servant plus the inscrutable gravity of a Ming ceramic idol: nevertheless his hands were trembling.

"You want us to stage a reconstruction of the crime, Commissaire," said Grace Talbot. "I understand."

"It seems nonsense to me," said Guy Lorrain. "And how are we going to remember just what we did? We were too excited to notice. . . ."

"Some of us haven't much to remember," said Theodore Hacker. He spoke a very beautiful French, but seemed to make a habit of expressing his views in an actually less perfect English.

"I guess some of us just moaned and bit our nails. That oughta be easy."

"I mean," said Guy Lorrain, with hurt dignity. "How do we remember the order in which we march—up the stairs, etcetera."

"There, Monsieur Norman will help you," said Saturnin. "He was the first, I think Dr. Allard was second, and Monsieur Hacker third to arrive outside the bedroom-door."

"That is so," Dr. Allard affirmed. "I was just behind Monsieur Norman."

"And I was behind Monsieur Lorrain," said Miss Talbot. "I was last up the stairs. No, I wasn't though. Ah Sing, you were behind me, I think?"

"Yes, mees," said Ah Sing.

"That will be okay?" said Mr. Hacker. "I reckon things will come back more clearly as we re-enact events, eh, Commissaire?"

"Just so, sir. I rely upon that," agreed Saturnin. "Also Monsieur Norman will be in charge and he has noted the order. You will find everything very easy. The door will be closed, but not of course locked or bolted. Monsieur Norman will push open the door. You will pour into the room, so far as possible just as you did before. Act as you did then. Madame Prad will be lying on the floor. Quite comfortably, Mister Hacker—have no fear. Now! Dr. Allard, who is a very busy man, has kindly consented to assist us in our little experiment . . . I don't suppose any of us wish to delay matters more than is necessary, so. . ."

"There's one point," said Guy Lorrain. "When we got to the door last night, Dr. Allard ran to an adjoining spare-room and took the key out of the door. His idea was it might fit the lock of Estelle's door. But of course that lost us a little time, and I take it timing is of some importance, Commissaire?"

"A little, perhaps," said Saturnin. "After Monsieur Norman arrives at the bedroom door he can count ten. Then he will thrust open the door. It is all clear then?"

Again he looked around the little *salon* where the card-tables still held things of the previous night and a wood-fire burned again, adding its cheerfulness to the efficient but incompañionable radiators.

"To me," said Dr. Allard, "All is perfectly clear."

"And to me," said Miss Talbot. "It's quite *thrilling* as well."

"I get the notion," said Hacker. "Except that I don't know where you come in, Commissaire. Where are you going to be?"

"You will see me again, Mister Hacker," said Saturnin. "Then it is all understood and agreed, *n'est-ce-pas?* Good! In two minutes you shall hear a little cry from Madame Prad. Then a banging on the floor. That banging is the signal. They are off! You are off, like the horse-races. Good!"

He grinned at them, looked quickly at Felix, and went out of the room. They heard the stairs creak as he mounted the lowest steps of the short staircase.

Felix crossed, and took his place with his back to the fire. He even picked up an empty glass and held it. Outwardly cool, he was

inwardly filled with intense curiosity and excitement. The cunning old Commissaire had got to the bottom of this mystery, but how he could have discovered the truth was something that completely baffled Felix.

There was a full minute of suspense which drew out the time until it appeared relatively a long half-hour. Guy Lorrain fidgeted with his tie and handkerchief, and kept hitching up his knife-creased trousers, displaying marvellous lilac silk socks. He had changed from his evening clothes, obtaining what he needed by telephoning to his *appartement* nearby. Dr. Allard had done the same and he looked with apparent calmness at his watch. Old Hacker was rubbing his chin, which was badly shaven, and staring at the others in the room. It was as though he was trying to determine which of them had knocked out his daughter and stolen her jewels.

Ah Sing gazed stolidly at an ormolu clock which stood on the mantelpiece behind Felix, its hands indicating that the hour was twenty minutes to twelve. Miss Talbot was fanning her flushed face with a copy of that morning's *Figaro*, a copy that still retained the exact folds in which it had been delivered at the door.

Theodore Hacker cleared his throat.

"Say, I hope this won't prove too much of an ordeal for Estelle? Maybe she's not quite up to it. . . ?"

He looked at Dr. Allard, who comprehended enough of the English speech to follow the other's apprehension: also the doctor knew the old American's knowledge of French was perfect.

"You have no cause for alarm, Monsieur Hacker. I will answer for your daughter's complete recovery. Fortunately her thick, abundant hair afforded her great protection."

"Good. Thank you, Doctor."

Hacker went to a card-table and opened a bottle of Evian water. There was a clean glass which he half filled. He drank slowly and with relish.

"I needed that," he said. "Somehow, this reconstruction business. . . ."

He broke off, for a woman's voice cried out from the room above.

There was a stamping of feet, and a heavy, muffled crash immediately over their heads.

"*Seigneur Dieu!*" cried Guy Lorrain.

Felix was already out of the room with Dr. Allard and old Hacker hard on his heels.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE : CHINOISERIE

"We all love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth knowing."—JANE AUSTEN

ABSURDLY, the little group of half a dozen people were as thrilled as though a real drama was being enacted, as though Estelle Prad

was again being mysteriously attacked and robbed. Sounds still came from the room above, a noise of drawers opening, of a man moving about heavily. Once more a great deal was happening in a short space of time.

Felix, forcing himself to think calmly, noted that he had the first-floor bedroom door in view the moment he began ascending the stairs; consequently it would have been impossible for Estelle's assailant to sneak out as the party came up the staircase. There had been in his mind the somewhat wild notion that the noises heard had been mechanically contrived after the miscreant's escape; or else that, in some incalculable fashion, Estelle Prad had made noises, though unconscious. To such wild imaginings is the human mind reduced when baffled by events seemingly inexplicable.

As he gained the landing Felix glanced quickly backwards. Miss Talbot's shining face showed eagerly behind Guy Lorrain's pallor, and Ah Sing in his white coat came last. The Brigadier had the handle of the bedroom-door in his hand, and, loudly, he began to count ten. From within came a sound of a drawer being opened, and then silence.

"Hear that?" said Hacker, excitedly.

"There is, I think, no need for me to play at getting the other doorway, monsieur?"

Dr. Allard asked the question. He, too, was excited and his voice trembled in spite of efforts at self-control. Felix shook his head in answer, continuing to count up to ten. Miss Talbot uttered a kind of breathless, school-girl giggle. Guy Lorrain did his utmost to look bored and signally failed.

"Ten!" concluded Felix, and flung open the door, with unnecessary violence. He was carried inside with the door. Before him, her head resting upon a cushion placed on the floor, lay Estelle Prad. Her face looked white, and she smiled uneasily, as though she also felt the reality of this reconstruction and in some measure re-lived the drama.

In a moment they were all around her, and were behaving more or less as they had done in the early hours of this very morning. Theodore Hacker proved himself possessed of considerable histrionic talent.

"Estelle!" he cried. "My daughter's been robbed! Look at those drawers! They've been forced!"

And he added, in quite a different tone.

"That's what I said, I guess. Roughly anyway."

"*Seigneur Dieu!*" said Guy Lorrain, with a feeble attempt to play up to the others. "Doctor! Doctor!"

Felix and the doctor were already kneeling beside the woman on the floor. Miss Talbot brought water and handed it to Dr. Allard. Hacker, who had been rubbing his chin and cogitating, suddenly became dramatic once more.

"Ah Sing!" he cried. "Here, quick! Go phone the police!"

The old man half turned and saw a white coat beside him. "Stop

on it!" he cried, testily. "That's what I said, and you. . . ."

He paused, conscious of something strange, some tenseness and added excitement in the atmosphere. Beside him stood a white-coated Chinaman; but Saturnin Dax was there, too, holding the man.

"By heck! That's not the same Chink, is it?"

Hacker peered down at Charlie Sing, clad in a white coat and watched over by the Commissaire. The two had emerged from a curtained recess and joined the throng that gathered around Estelle Prad. Now, everyone looked to where, hovering miserably uncertain in the bedroom doorway, stood Ah Sing, also in a white coat.

"Well, *really!*" said Miss Talbot, and giggled.

Dr. Allard looked at Hacker and laughed grimly.

"You sent your daughter's assailant—a thief—out of the room to telephone for the police, monsieur," he said. "*C'est cocasse!*"

A muffled sound came from old Hacker's lips. Tremblingly he raised his arm and struck out at the face of Charlie Sing. Saturnin jerked his captive back into safety.

"One moment," he said. "Mister Hacker, remain calm, please. This man is in custody and shall receive justice."

He looked round at their faces and watched Estelle Prad as she was helped, by the doctor, to her feet.

"You see now what happened," said Saturnin. "You broke in the door and all clustered round Madame Prad, lying unconscious there, by the dressing-table. This man stepped from the recess, behind me, and was on the fringe of the throng. Mister Hacker, seeing a white coat beside him, sent, as he thought, Ah Sing from the room. I don't suppose, Mister Hacker, you even looked up at the man's face, eh? A servant, in a white coat, standing where we expect him to stand, beside us. . . . Do we look into his face? Not usually. We take servants so much for granted."

"I didn't look," said Hacker. "And, if I had, I might not have noticed any difference. I'd only seen Ah Sing a couple of times, for a few moments. Anyway, these Chinks look much the same to me."

"Evidently," agreed Saturnin. "Even if Miss Talbot had instantly taken up her watchful position by the bedroom-door, it is possible she would have let Charlie here pass her by unremarked. We see what we expect to see, as a rule."

"I don't know about that, Commissaire," said Miss Talbot, dubiously. "That man is not much like Ah Sing. But, of course, I was bringing the water to Dr. Allard."

"Yes. All of you were occupied," said Saturnin. "Emotionally and mentally absorbed, far more than you are now, and the light is now much brighter. Anyhow, there is the solution to your little mystery. The only possible solution, I fancy."

The Commissaire smiled a little maliciously at Felix, who coloured up.

"Of course! I do so agree!" cried Miss Talbot. "And it was

so simple. Ah Sing never really came into the room. He turned back. I suppose he saw this other man. . . ."

"His brother," explained the Commissaire. "Ah Sing come here. Did you actually see your brother come from the recess? Or did you merely guess what had happened, by other things you had observed?"

The cook came forward very reluctantly. A whole world of wretchedness and shame was in his dark eyes.

"I saw through the crack of the door," he said. "My brother stole out from curtained recess, whilst the others bent over madame."

"Precisely."

Saturnin smiled rather complacently. Ah Sing was about to speak again when Charlie burst out into a flood of Chinese speech.

"Stop that!" shouted Hacker. "Let the other boy say his piece."

"Yes, animal," said Guy Lorrain, severely. "Speak French, if you must speak. But consider, if you have not done enough harm already."

"Yes—definitely," said Miss Talbot, with energy. "I do so agree."

"My brother came here, yesterday evening," said Ah Sing. "He told me he was leaving his ship. He asked me if I could help him get other employment. I could not. He has not got the labour-permit and papers for France."

"Besides which he is a bad egg—no?" said Dr. Allard, shrewdly.

Ah Sing said nothing, but hung his head lower.

"I could do nothing for my brother. In the evening I miss a white coat, and I wonder. . . . It worried me. I look over the silver in the pantry but all present and correct. Then come the cry from upstairs. I run up, after the others. I see through crack of door, as I say. I go back to hall and front door. I wonder. . . . I think Charlie will be caught. But he come down into the hall. He wants to go away. I want to be sure he has nothing of value in his pockets. I hear Monsieur Hacker say jewellery gone. So I argue with Charlie. I lift telephone and threaten to call police, if he does not give me jewellery. He hits me—and I know nothing. Whilst I know nothing he goes quickly away."

"Yes. That's it."

Saturnin took up the tale.

"I don't think we need be harsh with Ah Sing. He did not wish, unless it was quite unavoidable, to give up his brother to the police. That would be to lose face, eh? At risk to himself, and with considerable trouble, he went after Charlie, and no doubt he would have compelled him to return your jewellery, madame."

He looked at Estelle Prad, who smiled in return.

"I do not blame Ah Sing," she said. "I'm sure he is an excellent and faithful servant. He cannot help his brother's dishonesty."

We are born to relations as the sparks fly upwards, *n'est-ce-pas ?* "

Just for a fraction of a second she glanced at her old father. Then she laughed as she found a box of cigarettes.

"Miss Talbot has answered for Ah Sing," she added. "And I am ready to answer for Miss Talbot."

"That's perfectly sweet of you, dear," said Grace Talbot. "Of course Ah Sing was, I suppose, shielding his brother—at least for a time. But I feel *sure* he would not have acquiesced in a theft. He would have exposed, even his own brother, if necessary. Isn't that so, Ah Sing?"

Ah Sing said nothing, but somehow they all felt that his silence meant assent. Quite unexpectedly the villain of the piece showed a less villainous side to his character.

"Okay," he said. "My brother good boy. Honest. He no catchee jewellery. Me do. He no can do. Honest. Sorry! "

"So that's that," said Saturnin.

He held out to Estelle Prad a diamond brooch shaped like a tortoise and a plaque of diamond and emeralds.

"Of course you recognize these, as your jewellery, madame ? " he said.

Estelle Prad looked carefully at the plaque.

"I don't know about this," she said, doubtfully. "The tortoise is mine. I was wearing it."

"But, surely, Madame . . . ? The plaque is yours also ? "

"I don't know. Perhaps it is. I seldom wear emeralds. I think they're unlucky."

"So does Charlie," said Saturnin grimly. "But he admits stealing this from your top dressing-table drawer, after breaking it open. His finger prints are on the drawer. Perhaps Monsieur Guy Lorrain can identify the plaque ? "

"I, monsieur . . . ? "

Guy Lorrain stepped forward as though in surprise. He and Estelle Prad exchanged a glance..

"Why, yes," said Guy Lorrain. "I think that's yours, Estelle."

"By Heck! Don't you know your own jewellery ? " cried Hacker. "You girls don't deserve to get the stuff. Women ought not to handle money or property. They're crazy! Say, that's a valuable piece! And you don't even know whether it's yours! Well, I do. I remember it."

"All right, father," said Estelle. "It is mine. I recognise it now. The fact is I have been exchanging some of my jewellery with a jeweller in the Place Vendome. I've been doing so for some time now. One gets tired of the same things. And I loathe emeralds."

Old Hacker swore under his breath. Saturnin blandly pocketed the jewels again.

"I quite comprehend, madame," he said. "I suppose you may leave some piece of jewellery for months unworn. Well, I shall now take Charlie back with me to his new home, where he will

be quite comfortable and removed from temptation. Your jewels will be safe, madame."

He looked at Felix.

"I think we will have a taxi."

As the two police-officers, with Charlie Sing between them, were moving towards the door, Estelle Prad spoke again.

"Commissaire," she said. "I don't wish to prosecute that man."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: PRISONER'S STATEMENT.

"Uneasiness I have never actually shaken off; it creeps over me stealthily, perfidiously, insidiously, when I am most unaware of its existence."—ARTHUR SYMONS.

THE door of the cell was opened and the Commissaire pushed before him the reluctant Francois Jesick.

"Here we are," said Saturnin, cheerfully. "A visitor, Charlie."

Charlie Sing, who had been pacing the floor, halted and stared. Not all Orientals are of impassive appearance and bearing and Charlie was not. He glared at his visitors and muttered to himself incomprehensibly.

"I thought you two would be glad to meet again," said Saturnin.

"Don't tell me I'm wrong!"

"Again? Me not know that man," said Charlie.

"I have never seen this Chinaman before," said Jesick.

The Commissaire took out a yellow packet, shook up the cigarettes and picked one out with his lips.

"This," he said, "is not kind. In fact it is scarcely polite. Surely you haven't quarrelled?"

He looked at Jesick, whose cunning eyes wavered.

"Never seen him before, Commissaire. I swear it. On the head of my mother."

"Come! You forget things. Let me prompt you. The Café du Théâtre in the Rue de Clichy. You were with Maurice Rolla."

Jesick's pasty face became a shade whiter, but he shook his head.

"That was just before the Lorrain-Prad Bank affair," Saturnin resumed. "I have several witnesses, by the way."

His voice had hardened. Jesick shuffled his feet uneasily.

"One Chink looks like another to me," he muttered.

"Ah! But you know he's a Chink. That's something!"

"I . . . I don't know. He might, of course, be a Jap. I just thought. . . ."

"Yes, Charlie was introduced to you as a Chinaman, wasn't he? You can't tell one from the other, eh? Look at this!"

Saturnin caught the right hand of Charlie Sing, pushed back the man's sleeve and displayed a great serpent tattooed in blue and red and green, the lines curving away to the elbow and higher, and lost to sight beneath the shirt sleeve.

"You've never seen that before, Jesick?"

"Well? I can't quite. . . ."

"Be careful!"

Jesick licked his lips.

"One meets all sorts in a café. I may . . ."

"Look out for yourself! Up till now we've got nothing on you, Jesick. I have other witnesses. The proprietor of the Café du Théâtre. Two of the waiters."

Jesick hesitated, looked at the furious face of Charlie Sing and then away at the blank grey wall.

"I met him one night at the Café du Théâtre," said Jesick. "He was with Maurice Rolla. I know nothing about him. I think he said he was a sailor."

"Good! That was a night or two before the Lorrain-Prad Bank affair, eh?"

"Perhaps. Yes, I think it was. I was here, inside, myself, when. . . ."

"Just so. All right."

Saturnin pushed Jesick towards the door of the cell which was opened again from the outside.

"He one big liar," observed Charlie and followed the remark with a stream of Chinese speech probably more adequate to express his feelings.

Outside the cell, a long grim corridor was traversed, and then Saturnin pushed his man into a little bare waiting-room and shut the door.

"Here!" said Jesick, in alarm. "What's the idea, Commissaire? I've told you what you wanted, haven't I? I saw the Chink in that café with Maurice Rolla. I can't say more than that."

"No? What did you talk about?"

"How should I know? At this time of the day!"

"Art? Philosophy? The influence of false teeth on modern history? Or how best to enter a certain cellar window and rip the back of a certain safe?"

"Hell! Commissaire, I was for nothing in that business! You know it. Wasn't I in here? How could a man . . .?"

"Charlie was in it, wasn't he?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

"His part was to watch outside? By the van? The laundry van?"

"Maybe. He might. . . ."

"There's no might about it. You heard the thing being discussed. You'd have been in it, but for the accident of meeting Brigadier Flach and being run in."

"All right. Yes! Maurice Rolla was discussing the job. With the Chink, too. But I was out. You know I was out of it. You got nothing on me."

"You think not? There's such a thing as misprision, Jesick."

"What . . . ?"

"Withholding information, criminally. Concealing things of criminal import. I'm sorry, Jesick, but we shall have to hold you."

"What! You can't."

Jesick's jaw dropped ludicrously.

"Oh, yes, we can. I fear you'll never have an easy moment until you come across. Always you'll be liable to arrest and many a weary hour, day, night, week, month—perhaps year, will you spend inside these somewhat dreary walls."

"You can't do it! Misprision? What sort of fancy stuff is that?"

The man's small, piggy eyes darted a calculating look at the Commissaire, then Jesick licked his lips.

"What do you want to know?" he said, in a different voice. Saturnin smiled.

"Now you're talking. The name and address of the other man. Short and swarthy. Coffee and milk complexion, and pock-marked. Clean-shaven, but hair rather long. Good teeth, very white. Wounded, perhaps rather badly. A Spaniard, or Basque. From the south, anyway. Dresses well, in black, usually. Some rings. Carries a leather walking stick."

As Saturnin catalogued all this, Jesick's eyes widened in a stare, but his face became very white. He stared woodenly at the knot of Saturnin's tie and then anyway to a barred window.

"Come! The name and address. After that we won't trouble you, if you don't trouble us, Jesick."

"Do you swear that?"

"Yes. Give the name and address and you can go at once."

"I don't know his address. . . ."

"The name then."

Jesick licked his lips.

"Luis Marengo," he said. "That's the name he is known under. I think it's his real name. I don't know where he lives. But he goes to a bar, called The Barfly, up by the Gare Montparnasse. That's the only place I know where he can be found."

Saturnin nodded slowly, his eyes on Jesick's white face and trembling underlip.

"Right, Jesick. You can go. If you keep out of mischief you won't be worried by us."

Saturnin opened the door of the little waiting-room but Jesick laid a hand on the Commissaire's arm.

"Keep me here. I don't want to go out."

"What?"

"Keep me inside until you get him. You must, Commissaire! I done my best for you. I won't be safe unless I'm kept here, till you get Marengo."

"It's like that, is it?"

Saturnin looked curiously at the other's frightened eyes and trembling frame.

"All right. You can stay here a few days. If your information is right, we should get him within a week."

"You won't take him alive," said Jesick.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

"What reason, like the careful ant, draws laboriously together, the wind of accident collects in one brief moment."—SCHILLER

INTO the Commissaire's office came Felix Norman. The Brigadier wore a new overcoat of a snappy buff shade. On his hands were pigskin gloves. Under his arm a package enclosed in brown paper. The young man's face carried an expression of elaborate casualness as he set his parcel down on Saturnin's desk and proceeded to take off his coat and hang it up.

"A present, my boy? Very nice of you, I'm sure."

Saturnin sat back in his chair, dropped his pen, and stared at the package. Felix perched himself on a corner of the big desk beside the parcel.

"A present, I think," he agreed. "Comes rather indirectly. Bit curiously, too. You know these letter-box affairs they have in lamp-posts? The base is hollow. There's a metal flap and you drop your letter inside the base of the lamp-post. Usually they are placed opposite a tobacconist and . . ."

"I've read about them," said the Commissaire, drily. "In fact I have seen one. Years ago, when I was even younger than you are now."

"Good! Well, lately, they have been condemning them. Sticking notices on the lamp-posts that letters should be posted elsewhere—nearest box or post-office given. Metal flap in lamp-post box secured by wire or something."

Saturnin nodded.

"Even that, I know," he said. "Although I live out in the wilds of Meudon Val Fleury, it sometimes happens to me that I wish to post a letter for myself, in Paris. Consequently I have noticed that these somewhat old-fashioned devices are being condemned. No doubt, a good thing. Sometimes, though rarely, what is called 'progress' arrives at being fairly intelligent. I . . ."

"Good!" interrupted Felix. "I just wanted to present things in an orderly manner. Now for facts. An hour ago a young man driving a tradesman's motor-tricycle had an accident. Somehow his machine got out of control, or he was trying to be clever. In any case he left the road, went up on the sidewalk, and did his best to eliminate a lamp-post. He is now in the hospital with a broken arm and concussion. The lamp-post, being hollow at the base, was burst open. It had been used a year ago as a letter-box—now condemned. This was in the Rue de la Conference."

"Ah! Close to the Lorrain-Prad Bank?"

"Close to the Lorrain-Prad Bank. And, in the condemned letter-box, inadequately closed with a piece of wire, were certain articles. Found by an intelligent *agent* who was brought to the scene of the messenger-boy's accident."

As he spoke Felix undid loosely-knotted string and turned back paper. A biscuit-tin was revealed. Also a curious-looking piece of canvas which Felix handled gingerly and which took shape as a sort of hood. Once the canvas had been white or near-white. Now it was grimy, but there were two eye-holes, and it looked as though the sole purpose of the contrivance could be only a disguising hood, something to cover the head and the whole face, and fall in loose folds to the shoulders.

"Ku-Klux-Klan, what?" said Felix.

Saturnin rose, took gloves from his overcoat pocket, put them on and examined the hood. His eyes were thoughtful.

"Exhibit, Number Two," said Felix. "A revolver. Smith and Wesson."

From the biscuit-tin Felix picked out a revolver. It had a ring fixed in its butt and the Brigadier held the weapon by this ring.

"Any shots fired?" asked Saturnin.

"Two—perhaps," said Felix. "A curious thing—this is loaded with blanks."

"Ah!"

Saturnin dropped the canvas hood, only glanced at the revolver, and then walked over to his stove. He was thumbing his moustache with an air of the greatest preoccupation.

"What do you make of that?" said Felix. "Often a fellow loads his first chamber with a blank for safety's sake, though more often he leaves it unloaded. Of course a blank might scare a fellow, and so do the necessary. But loading all the chambers with blanks. . . . Bit queer, what? I suppose they were all loaded with blanks? No one would load his first two chambers with shot and the rest with blanks. Very queer, eh?"

"Ah!"

Saturnin hummed a fragment of the "Unfinished." He had the lower end of his spine presented to the blaze of the stove. Abstractedly he lit a cigarette.

"Since the articles were found in the Rue de la Conference," Felix went on. "There is probably some connection with the Lorrain-Prad Bank affair—what? Otherwise a very queer coincidence, no? Hood affair is grimy. Been there some time. Month or two, no doubt. In fact dumped there about time of the burglary. Good spot to dump incriminating material. For a fellow in a hurry, what? But for our acrobatic friend on the motor-tricycle these articles would have been in the condemned letter-box until the City started building new lamp-posts. Say, two hundred years time—what?"

"Aha!" said Saturnin, smoking, humming, and toasting that part

of his anatomy which receives prominence during our school-days.

"Connected with the Bank affair, of course."

"Yes. What I thought," said Felix. "What the intelligent *agent* thought. Too much coincidence otherwise. The hood worn by one of the burglars—the fellow who got away. All right. But the revolver? How come? I thought the fellow who got away shot poor old Degray, with a Spanish Victoria. Bullets found, eh? An automatic. So where does the Smith and Wesson come in? Was there another burglar there? A timid fellow? Carried a gun with blanks? Got away quick, and pushed his hood and gun into the letter-box? That is, after firing two blanks, eh? Two blanks failed to scare Degray, of course. Or, whilst this fellow fired blanks to intimidate, his pals shot to kill—and killed! Whereupon the timid fellow left, in a hurry—what?"

"Ah!" said Saturnin.

"It's queer," said Felix. "Look's as though there's another fellow to find now, besides this Luis Marengo. Or do you think the Chink wore the hood and fired the blanks? Suppose. . ."

"Listen," said Saturnin. "The technical laboratory had better be given these articles, my boy. Until Baschet has looked 'em over we can spare our theories."

"Yes. . . ." said Felix, a little reluctantly. "There may be fingerprints, or hairs or something."

With his gloved hands he put back hood and revolver into the biscuit-tin.

"By the way," he said. "Grace Talbot tells me Guy Lorrain is all broken up by recent events. He's going for a pleasure cruise. Bought a new lilac tie, and everything."

"Where?"

"Cruise starts from Cherbourg or Havre. The *Arlésienne*, a motor vessel. Lovely ship. Touches Lisbon, Madeira, the Canaries and so forth. Four or five weeks at sea, lucky devil!"

"Going alone?"

"Yes. So I understand. Estelle Prad is having a holiday with her father, in England. Grace thinks Papa dislikes the idea of his daughter marrying Guy Lorrain. But Grace is convinced the marriage will take place, just the same, though probably after Papa has returned to America."

Saturnin grunted.

"When does this cruise start?"

"Date isn't precisely fixed yet. But it will be, very soon. Grace will let me know."

"Ah!"

"Pleasure cruise—what? Lisbon and Madeira. He might jump the ship, and change for Buenos Aires, or Rio, eh? Supposing he wants to get away, I mean. The widow might join him later. A new life in a new land, where men are men and lilac ties are really appreciated, what?"

"You're jealous. The fact is, you don't like Guy Lorrain."

"Perhaps that's it. Meanwhile, what's wrong with him? I mean, beside the dope. Why is he doping? What does he fear? and what does he know? Could he tell us anything about this canvas mask and the gun loaded with blanks? What do you think?"

"Ah!" said Saturnin.

"That burglary was a queer affair, and Guy Lorrain knows it. Who got out of the cellar? Who kidnapped old Lorrain and what happened to him? The son could tell us a lot if he liked. I think that's pretty certain, eh?"

"Ah!" said Saturnin.

"Then, there's this fellow, Paul Neveux," said Felix. "He's done well for himself, hasn't he? Recently promoted from manager to a director. But now he's got everything in his hands. He is pinch-hitting for all the..."

"Pinch-hitting?" said Saturnin. "What sort of a phrase is that?"

"An Americanism. It means, acting as substitute for someone. A superior sort of..."

"Listen a little!"

The Commissaire threw back his coat-tails and advanced two paces towards his subordinate.

"You are a Frenchman, *hein*? That means you have the inestimable benefit of possessing, at your command, one of the noblest, finest, and most logical of tongues. A language made by poets, philosophers and scholars. A speech growing subtly and splendidly, and perfectly fitted for all civilized purposes. A language that other cultured peoples have been happy to use in their embassies and in international relationships. A language fostered, preserved and kept pure by the Immortals. And yet you decline this noble speech, and stoop to the slang of film-actors and baseball fans! Thunder of God! Is not French rich enough in argot? Even here we lead the world. If you seek such brilliant phrases, you have them in our *Et comment* or our *Tu parles!* Must we import these poor things? Take them again, in cans from Hollywood, and be pleased to speak American, and say 'And how!' or 'You're telling me!'?"

"Enough of this nonsense, please! At least in this department, and whilst I have the honour of running it, we shall, if you please, use the tongue of Racine and Corneille. That speech, with your permission, Brigadier, will be good enough for us to use officially. That is understood, is it not? Once and for all!"

"Okay," said Felix.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE ELUSIVE PASSENGER

"The whole phenomena of morals are animal-like, and have their origin in the search for prey and the avoidance of pursuit."—
HAVELOCK ELLIS

FELIX NORMAN had left the Commissaire's office only a bare ten minutes when Brigadier Alder entered it. The lean, dark, tough Brigadier wore an air, half-satisfied, half-exasperated, and wholly grim. Saturnin had never seen the man look really tired but his movements were now listless and around the eyes and mouth were subtle lines suggesting lack of sleep and considerable fatigue.

"Well, Georges? How's life at Pont de Lyss?"

Saturnin pushed a packet of cigarettes across his desk as the other sat down. Alder loosened his black mackintosh. He took and lit a cigarette before answering.

"Too much garlic in the food, for my taste. But there's quite a good little wine, and a cheese. However. . ."

He blew a cloud of smoke down his nostrils and changed his tone.

"It looks as though we have got on to the fellow, *patron*. Although he has cleared out—temporarily, at least. Anyway the name, or working alias is Robert Organd. He took a villa just before the Lorrain-Prad Bank affair. Called the Villa des Violettes."

"Good work, Georges!"

"Mind you, I may be wrong. May be coincidences at work in some way, but I don't think so. On the night Chartrettes was bumped there was only one first-class ticket sold at the Fontainebleau Station for Pont de Lyss for the last train. Except for half a dozen railway workers only one passenger passed out through the Pont de Lyss barrier. That is, only one likely to interest us. Tall, clean-shaven, vague notion that he might be an American. Moreover, this man, on this particular night, seemed to try and evade giving up his ticket."

"Ah! They make mistakes, luckily, eh, Georges? At least those we get to know do."

"Yes. The ticket collector thought he had seen 'em all off the premises. It was late. Not much light. Frugal people at Pont de Lyss! So the ticket collector was about to leave the gate, where outgoing passengers file through, and complete his task for the day. In fact he went to a lamp-room, but came out again quick because he thought he heard footsteps. He was right. A tall, clean-shaven man, very well dressed, the collector says, was diving through the gate to the street. The collector ran after him. If the passenger hadn't been so well-dressed there'd probably have been a row. As it was the official kept his temper, with an effort, and asked for the ticket."

"In fact the ticket collector remained calm, and collected?" Saturnin suggested.

"He did. When he got a look at the man—his clothes and manner—the ticket collector, who seems to be naturally irascible—forced himself to cool down. The passenger was suave enough, and presented his first-class ticket, from Fontainebleau. The collector thought he might have to deal with a foreigner, ignorant of our customs, and he cooled off a bit."

"This Robert Organd, spoke then with some kind of accent?"

"Yes. The ticket collector says so. An English accent he thought—but he knows no English. Nor did he notice very much about the man, at least, not that he can recall now. He was annoyed and suspicious. Thought there'd been an attempt to bilk the company and so land him in trouble. Consequently he took the ticket to a lamp and looked it over as though it were his best girl's photograph. Conscientious fellow. Occupied more with the ticket than the man we want. Seeing it was valid the old fellow became a lot calmer. And a lot less suspicious. Thought the passenger was a foreigner, and therefore innocent of guile. Had remained behind purely by accident, or some natural innocent necessity. There's everything necessary on the platform. W.C. Hot and cold water. . . ."

"Just so. But the little incident led the ticket collector to remember our man. In fact his manoeuvres worked just the wrong way for him, eh?"

"That's what I think. Moreover, he made another mistake. He wanted to tip the ticket collector. Offered a note, a biggish one, the collector thought."

Sapristi! Do they refuse money at Pont de Lyss? It seems morbid. And they so frugal, too. . . .?"

Georges Alder smiled.

"This collector is a character, I tell you! Unique. I should say. Mind you, he was annoyed. Somehow, his dignity and authority had been challenged. He had been obliged to run, out into the station yard, half way to the street. Generally speaking I should think he would collect tips as efficiently as tickets. But this one smacked too much of bribery, perhaps. Maybe, it wasn't offered the right way, with the right tone, at the right moment. Maybe, the collector wanted to get back at the monsieur, and this was the only way. By declining money, he got level with the monsieur. Equality and liberty, if not fraternity,

Saturnin grunted.

"Sound enough psychology, Georges. You know and have talked with the incorruptible, anyway. So our elusive friends made another error, and got himself fixed in the collector's indignant mind very firmly."

"Yes. Even the date of the event, too. And there was another bit of luck. A man known to the collector, had come in

his automobile to meet the train ; and his wife, who did not actually come by the train. Man in automobile hangs about and sees the elusive one whom he greets with respect."

"Ah! That's how you got the name of Robert Organd ?"

"Finally, yes, *patron*. Fellow in automobile merely raised his hat and said, *Bon soir, monsieur*. But the ticket collector noted it and marked the incident as going to prove the respectability of the evasive passenger. Ticket collector knew man in automobile as local wine merchant. Gave me his name. The wine merchant, whom I questioned, did not know the name of Robert Organd, but knew him as a recent arrival in Pont de Lyss and a man who had taken a villa on the outskirts of the town. Ultimately I found the estate agent who let the villa. I worked at the telephone people, for Chartrettes probably phoned his intended victim, eh ? So I discovered this Robert Organd. He did not himself take the villa. He sent a woman along to do the job. She told the estate agent she was secretary to Monsieur Organd. The estate agent says she looked like a *poule-de-luxe* and knew nothing about offices or business. However, she negotiated for the villa and paid cash for six months' rent in advance. She got the furniture put in, too. Then she fades out of the picture. Organd came. But no one saw much of him. The fellow who installed the telephone saw him, and described him much as the collector did. Not a good witness. Local tradespeople saw little of Organd. An old woman came in the mornings, and did for him. She might have been selected for her qualities as a thoroughly bad witness. Very deaf, half blind and the reputation of a *cretin*. Only got her employer's coffee in the morning and cleaned up the place. She says he liked cooking and did it himself, when he didn't go out to the restaurants. He varied his restaurants a lot, a thing which left him unpopular, but unremarked."

"Yes. He took some trouble, Georges."

"He did. It is pretty certain he is our man. He fades out the day after Chartrettes' death and the scene with the ticket-collector. At least no one seems to have seen him since. The *femme de ménage* was told he was going away, to the South, for a holiday. She need not call again until she heard from her employer."

Georges Alder accepted a second cigarette and lighted it

"Well, that's the lot, *patron*. At least, for the moment. The Villa des Violettes stands empty. It is being watched. If Robert Organd comes back, day or night, he will be held."

Saturnin thumbed his moustache to left and right and looked thoughtfully at his colleague

"You haven't by any chance taken a look inside the Villa, Georges ?"

"Not much. Not satisfactorily. There are steel shutters on the front windows and special locks everywhere."

"Ah !"

"Yes, significant, perhaps. I got in at the back but found nothing

"You're jealous. The fact is, you don't like Guy Lorrain."

"Perhaps that's it. Meanwhile, what's wrong with him? I mean, beside the dope. Why is he doping? What does he fear? and what does he know? Could he tell us anything about this canvas mask and the gun loaded with blanks? What do you think?"

"Ah!" said Saturnin.

"That burglary was a queer affair, and Guy Lorrain knows it. Who got out of the cellar? Who kidnapped old Lorrain and what happened to him? The son could tell us a lot if he liked. I think that's pretty certain, eh?"

"Ah!" said Saturnin.

"Then, there's this fellow, Paul Neveux," said Felix. "He's done well for himself, hasn't he? Recently promoted from manager to a director. But now he's got everything in his hands. He is pinch-hitting for all the..."

"Pinch-hitting?" said Saturnin. "What sort of a phrase is that?"

"An Americanism. It means, acting as substitute for someone. A superior sort of..."

"Listen a little!"

The Commissaire threw back his coat-tails and advanced two paces towards his subordinate.

"You are a Frenchman, *hein*? That means you have the inestimable benefit of possessing, at your command, one of the noblest, finest, and most logical of tongues. A language made by poets, philosophers and scholars. A speech growing subtly and splendidly, and perfectly fitted for all civilized purposes. A language that other cultured peoples have been happy to use in their embassies and in international relationships. A language fostered, preserved and kept pure by the Immortals. And yet you decline this noble speech, and stoop to the slang of film-actors and baseball fans! Thunder of God! Is not French rich enough in argot? Even here we lead the world. If you seek such brilliant phrases, you have them in our *Et comment* or our *Tu parles*! Must we import these poor things? Take them again, in cans from Hollywood, and be pleased to speak American, and say 'And how!' or 'You're telling me!'"

"Enough of this nonsense, please! At least in this department, and whilst I have the honour of running it, we shall, if you please, use the tongue of Racine and Corneille. That speech, with your permission, Brigadier, will be good enough for us to use officially. That is understood, is it not? Once and for all!"

"Okay," said Felix.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE ELUSIVE PASSENGER

"The whole phenomena of morals are animal-like, and have their origin in the search for prey and the avoidance of pursuit."—
HAVELOCK ELLIS

FELIX NORMAN had left the Commissaire's office only a bare ten minutes when Brigadier Alder entered it. The lean, dark, tough Brigadier wore an air, half-satisfied, half-exasperated, and wholly grim. Saturnin had never seen the man look really tired but his movements were now listless and around the eyes and mouth were subtle lines suggesting lack of sleep and considerable fatigue.

"Well, Georges? How's life at Pont de Lyss?"

Saturnin pushed a packet of cigarettes across his desk as the other sat down. Alder loosened his black mackintosh. He took and lit a cigarette before answering.

"Too much garlic in the food, for my taste. But there's quite a good little wine, and a cheese. However. . . ."

He blew a cloud of smoke down his nostrils and changed his tone.

"It looks as though we have got on to the fellow, *patron*. Although he has cleared out—temporarily, at least. Anyway the name, or working alias is Robert Organd. He took a villa just before the Lorrain-Prad Bank affair. Called the Villa des Violettes."

"Good work, Georges!"

"Mind you, I may be wrong. May be coincidences at work in some way, but I don't think so. On the night Chartrettes was bumped there was only one first-class ticket sold at the Fontainebleau Station for Pont de Lyss for the last train. Except for half a dozen railway workers only one passenger passed out through the Pont de Lyss barrier. That is, only one likely to interest us. Tall, clean-shaven, vague notion that he might be an American. Moreover, this man, on this particular night, seemed to try and evade giving up his ticket."

"Ah! They make mistakes, luckily, eh, Georges? At least those we get to know do."

"Yes. The ticket collector thought he had seen 'em all off the premises. It was late. Not much light. Frugal people at Pont de Lyss! So the ticket collector was about to leave the gate, where outgoing passengers file through, and complete his task for the day. In fact he went to a lamp-room, but came out again quick because he thought he heard footsteps. He was right. A tall, clean-shaven man, very well dressed, the collector says, was diving through the gate to the street. The collector ran after him. If the passenger hadn't been so well-dressed there'd probably have been a row. As it was the official kept his temper, with an effort, and asked for the ticket."

"In fact the ticket collector remained calm, and collected?" Saturnin suggested.

"He did. When he got a look at the man—his clothes and manner—the ticket collector, who seems to be naturally irascible—forced himself to cool down. The passenger was suave enough, and presented his first-class ticket, from Fontainebleau. The collector thought he might have to deal with a foreigner, ignorant of our customs, and he cooled off a bit."

"This Robert Organd, spoke then with some kind of accent?"

"Yes. The ticket collector says so. An English accent he thought—but he knows no English. Nor did he notice very much about the man, at least, not that he can recall now. He was annoyed and suspicious. Thought there'd been an attempt to bilk the company and so land him in trouble. Consequently he took the ticket to a lamp and looked it over as though it were his best girl's photograph. Conscientious fellow. Occupied more with the ticket than the man we want. Seeing it was valid the old fellow became a lot calmer. And a lot less suspicious. Thought the passenger was a foreigner, and therefore innocent of guile. Had remained behind purely by accident, or some natural innocent necessity. There's everything necessary on the platform. W.C. Hot and cold water. . . ."

"Just so. But the little incident led the ticket collector to remember our man. In fact his manoeuvres worked just the wrong way for him, eh?"

"That's what I think. Moreover, he made another mistake. He wanted to tip the ticket collector. Offered a note, a biggish one, the collector thought."

Sapristi! Do they refuse money at Pont de Lyss? It seems morbid. And they so frugal, too. . . .?"

Georges Alder smiled.

"This collector is a character, I tell you! Unique. I should say. Mind you, he was annoyed. Somehow, his dignity and authority had been challenged. He had been obliged to run, out into the station yard, half way to the street. Generally speaking I should think he would collect tips as efficiently as tickets. But this one smacked too much of bribery, perhaps. Maybe, it wasn't offered the right way, with the right tone, at the right moment. Maybe, the collector wanted to get back at the monsieur, and this was the only way. By declining money, he got level with the monsieur. Equality and liberty, if not fraternity,

Saturnin grunted.

"Sound enough psychology, Georges. You know and have talked with the incorruptible, anyway. So our elusive friends made another error, and got himself fixed in the collector's indignant mind very firmly."

"Yes. Even the date of the event, too. And there was another bit of luck. A man known to the collector, had come in

his automobile to meet the train ; and his wife, who did not actually come by the train. Man in automobile hangs about and sees the elusive one whom he greets with respect."

"Ah! That's how you got the name of Robert Organd ?"

"Finally, yes, *patron*. Fellow in automobile merely raised his hat and said, *Bon soir, monsieur*. But the ticket collector noted it and marked the incident as going to prove the respectability of the evasive passenger. Ticket collector knew man in automobile as local wine merchant. Gave me his name. The wine merchant, whom I questioned, did not know the name of Robert Organd, but knew him as a recent arrival in Pont de Lyss and a man who had taken a villa on the outskirts of the town. Ultimately I found the estate agent who let the villa. I worked at the telephone people, for Chartrettes probably phoned his intended victim, eh ? So I discovered this Robert Organd. He did not himself take the villa. He sent a woman along to do the job. She told the estate agent she was secretary to Monsieur Organd. The estate agent says she looked like a *poule-de-luxe* and knew nothing about offices or business. However, she negotiated for the villa and paid cash for six months' rent in advance. She got the furniture put in, too. Then she fades out of the picture. Organd came. But no one saw much of him. The fellow who installed the telephone saw him, and described him much as the collector did. Not a good witness. Local tradespeople saw little of Organd. An old woman came in the mornings, and did for him. She might have been selected for her qualities as a thoroughly bad witness. Very deaf, half blind and the reputation of a *cretin*. Only got her employer's coffee in the morning and cleaned up the place. She says he liked cooking and did it himself, when he didn't go out to the restaurants. He varied his restaurants a lot, a thing which left him unpopular, but unremarked."

"Yes. He took some trouble, Georges."

"He did. It is pretty certain he is our man. He fades out the day after Chartrettes' death and the scene with the ticket-collector. At least no one seems to have seen him since. The *femme de ménage* was told he was going away, to the South, for a holiday. She need not call again until she heard from her employer."

Georges Alder accepted a second cigarette and lighted it

"Well, that's the lot, *patron*. At least, for the moment. The Villa des Violettes stands empty. It is being watched. If Robert Organd comes back, day or night, he will be held."

Saturnin thumbed his moustache to left and right and looked thoughtfully at his colleague

"You haven't by any chance taken a look inside the Villa, Georges ?"

"Not much. Not satisfactorily. There are steel shutters on the front windows and special locks everywhere."

"Ah!"

"Yes, significant, perhaps. I got in at the back but found nothing

of interest. But there was one room I could not get into. Might be something there. And, of course, might give us a lot. However, the local Prefect is a great upholder of the rights of Man as well as the laws of men. I didn't want to get in bad with him. Perhaps you could . . . ? ”

“ Yes. I must take a look at this Villa des Violettes. Sounds attractive. I suppose there's a garden ? ”

Saturnin put his question casually, but the Brigadier stared in quick suspicion.

“ Yes. Front and back. A gardener did quite a bit of work, too. I went after him, but didn't get much. He's in the local hospital now, with some obscure trouble. He gave me the same bare description of Robert Organd. Might fit a thousand middle-aged business men. Anyway, the gardener came for a time, did his stuff and went off. He didn't see much of his employer. Just put in plants and bulbs and tidied up: the villa had stood empty for some time.”

Saturnin nodded.

“ Good! I suppose the gardener didn't mention what plants or bulbs he'd put in ? ”

“ No.”

Georges Alder's dark eyes lit up with curiosity.

“ No, he didn't. Gardening is not much in my line, *patron*. But if you want to know that, I suppose we can easily find out. We could dig some of the stuff up and examine it, eh ? ”

“ True,” said Saturnin. “ We could, Georges. Perhaps we shall.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE MADE

“ ‘ All the worse! ’ said Julien ; ‘ at least, when we commit crimes we should commit them with pleasure: that is the only good thing about them, and the only excuse that can in any way justify them. ’ ”
—STENDHAL

MONSIEUR PAUL NEVEUX opened a side-door of the Lorrain-Prad Bank and closed it behind him. He stood in the Rue de la Conference. It was half past six of a cold, dark December evening, and an unwelcome wind swept up from the river.

The bank-director looked up at the sky across which a flotilla of dark clouds could be observed sailing across the vast pink searchlight that Paris flung at the heavens. There were a few people about, mostly employees hurrying to bus and metro, most of them young, gay and ardent despite the icy blast. A roving taxi turned a corner from the quays, and its driver looked an inquiry at Neveux, who nodded.

“ The Gare St. Lazare,” he directed. .

He got into the taxi without a look to right or left, but, during the short journey, he several times surveyed the street and traffic

through the tiny pane of glass in the back of the hood. An old-fashioned taxi sometimes has its uses . . .

At the Gare St. Lazare the banker walked briskly up to the great "hall of lost footsteps." But there, appropriately enough, he became an idler, and a saunterer. One might have thought he was awaiting someone, or had a half-hour to kill before the departure of a train. Paul Neveux gazed into the windows of *boutiques* where varied articles, jewellery, wine, leather goods, were displayed. He looked over the contents of news-stands and even visited a salon in which the railway company offered freely to their patrons an exhibition of modern painters—all of whom had, by some chance, painted beauty spots situated along the company's routes.

Here, in this smallish room, Neveux at one time found himself alone with a large, broad-shouldered man whose greying, clipped moustache had a suggestion of military aggressiveness, as had his double-breasted, blue overcoat and his large but tight and shining boots. This man never once looked at Neveux, but he scarcely seemed to look at the pictures either. Almost conspicuously was he devoid of the ordinary human curiosity. Before one picture he set his cravat and yawned cavernously: then, recovering himself, he looked around with an air of guilt and walked out.

Paul Neveux lingered. Now and then he glanced at his watch, but he also gave attention to the pictures, many of which deserved a fuller notice. Some twenty minutes later, however, he was once more sauntering along the great *salle*. Again he looked at his watch—a little distractedly perhaps, for an immense clock over his head proclaimed for saunterers and travellers the passing of the hours. The banker went to a news-stand and bought some weekly illustrated journals. He appeared careless of the papers he bought, but a little fussy as to the way in which they were packed and rolled up together.

Having made these purchases Paul Neveux became suddenly brisk. He went through a tunnel-like passage from the *salle* to the actual, workaday platforms. Here he met a stream of travellers arriving from the provinces. Neveux mixed with them. He lost himself in the pushing, struggling multitude; he was hit behind the knees by suitcases, shouldered by hurrying men and stabbed by the umbrellas of perspiring, powderless women. But he took it all with frigid, uncomplaining calm. He went with the crowd. He was carried down steps to the Rue d'Amsterdam. He went up steps into a post office. He went straight through this useful building without hesitation and without pause. He emerged quickly and jumped into a crawling taxi, before its driver had even observed that he had a client. "Where to, monsieur?"

The surprised and slightly aggrieved driver pushed down his flag and looked back, through the dividing glass.

"You know a bar, called The Barfly? Up by the Gare Montparnasse? You do? Good! Take me there, and stop a few metres away from it. Understand?"

The driver perfectly understood. Paul Neveux examined his roll of magazines and altered the shape and structure a little. Occasionally he glanced through the back window of the taxi at the street behind his speeding car. He saw nothing that quickened his interest. Nevertheless, when he alighted in the little narrow thoroughfare where the sign of the Barfly was manifest, another taxi halted twenty metres behind his own. As Neveux paid off his driver he saw another disbursing also, and it was the military-looking man of tight clothes and clipped moustache who had yawned in the face of modern art.

Neveux shrugged imperceptibly. For a fraction of a second he hesitated, then he entered the bar. Behind mahogany a white-coated man played with a metal flask as though upon a concertina, and then poured a yellow-brown liquid, white-foamed, into three small glasses, eyed thirstily by three large men. These, barman and clients, looked curiously at Neveux as at a stranger, but he ignored them. His eyes, cold but keen and watchful, had already noted a doorless doorway with steps beyond. From this direction came the sound of a piano played by carelessly skilful fingers.

Neveux descended a short staircase. Half-way down he saw that below him was a long room divided into cubicles, each with its small table and chairs. In a great mirror Neveux caught a glimpse of two empty cubicles. In a third partitioned box, however, a man was staring moodily at the floor, and picking his teeth. This man was short, swarthy, pock-marked and of Mediterranean appearance. There were rings on his brown hands and a leather walking-stick between his knees.

At sight of this person the banker paused for a moment on the stairs. Then he went on at a quick pace. Into the roll of magazines he was carrying he thrust something which he had slipped from an overcoat pocket.

The police car, driven by skilful and slightly ruthless hands, ran up the Rue de Rennes. Without fuss or fanfare, it slipped through the traffic like an expert skater on an overcrowded rink, whilst the white batons of authority conferred advantage and precedence.

Georges Alder, seated in front beside a plain clothes driver, turned slightly to speak to those behind.

"Flach has done all right. But we should have heard, before Neveux did everything possible to slip him. These railway stations are devilish awkward places to watch anyone in."

Saturnin Dax nodded.

"Flach had done all right. But we should have heard, before this, that Luis Marengo was at The Barfly."

Felix Norman, on the back seat beside the Commissaire, put in a word.

"We have the telephone service to thank for that," he said. "So long as our telephones are just a bad joke, this sort of thing is

bound to happen. In Sweden or England one gets a connection reasonably quick, but . . ."

"All right, all right. Travel broadens the mind, especially when its done by celluloid! Get on, man! Sound your horn. Catch the eye of that traffic-fool, there!"

The car had been held, at a corner of the Rue de Vaugirard. The agent on traffic-duty had failed to remark the official nature of the powerful, dark automobile. But he noticed now, and hastily adjusted matters.

Felix glanced quickly at Saturnin who was not commonly given to nervous irritability. The Commissaire was gnawing savagely at his moustache.

"A quarter of an hour lost—at least. But I can, of course, tell the Chief that if we had the telephones of Sweden, then bank-robbers and murderers would not slip through our fingers. Take the Rue d' Odessa!"

This last was addressed to the driver, who swung his car off to the left. A minute later they glided to the kerb under the sign and blazonry of The Barfly. A man with greying, clipped moustache and martial air opened the side door of the car and spoke.

"The Spaniard and Neveux are downstairs. Pellegrin is at the back entrance. They've been talking together for . . ."

Saturnin Dix was out of the car and pushed back the self-closing door. Behind mahogany a white-coated man poured a yellow-brown liquid, white crested and foaming, into three small glasses. Saturnin heard a languid piano below-stairs, and saw a doorless doorway. He advanced towards this entrance, and, as he did so, a shot rang out and then another.

"An ambulance!" cried the Commissaire, over his shoulder, and he ran down the stairs. In his hand was a heavy-calibre pistol, but he was not confronted with the spectacle he had thought to see. In a cubicle Paul Neveux stood, an automatic pistol in his hand. At his feet lay the body of a short, broad-shouldered man, brown and pock-marked. The body twitched and was still.

"Commissaire!" cried Paul Neveux.

Saturnin, his eyes on the banker, knelt to examine Luis Marengo and found him dead. Norman and Alder were now in the cubicle, and Norman took the pistol from Neveux's unresisting hand. The café was almost empty, and the curious were kept away by Flach who was upstairs and Pellegrin who had entered at the back, when he heard the shots.

"Is he dead, *patron*?" asked Alder, and Saturnin nodded, his eyes on Paul Neveux's face.

"I told him to put his hands up," said Paul Neveux. "That man is a dangerous criminal. A blackmailer and a kidnapper. He admitted as much, to me."

Saturnin rose to his feet.

"You mean that this man made an appointment here with you? With the object of blackmail?"

"Not exactly blackmail, Commissaire. He 'phoned me late this afternoon. Said if I wished to see Edouard Lorrain again, alive, I would meet him in this place. Secretly. Without telling the police."

"Yes . . . ?"

The Commissaire held out his hand and Felix put into it a Colt automatic. Saturnin examined it quickly.

"You shot with this ?"

"Yes. He demanded money. I pulled out that pistol and ordered him to put up his hands. Instead, he came at me. I fired . . . I scarcely knew I had pressed the trigger. Never before have I fired such a weapon. It was all instinctive and in self-defence."

"Evidently."

Saturnin took from the table a roll of magazines, smelt at the packet and examined it.

A slight flush came into Paul Neveux's cold face.

"I concealed my pistol in that package, Commissaire. I had to deal with a dangerous bandit, *n'est-ce-pas* ? I should be no match for such a man unless I could contrive some element of surprise. As it was, he reached for his hip-pocket. I . . . I was barely in time. I did not, of course, intend to kill. I fired, blindly."

"Precisely. So Marengo demanded money for the release of Edouard Lorrain ?"

"Marengo . . . ? Ah, that man there ? I did not know his name. But, yes, he indicated that he was one of the gang who held poor Monsieur Edouard. If this bandit may be believed my poor Chief is still alive. His kidnappers fell out, and one group took him away from the others. Of course, whether that bandit was speaking the truth, I can't say. I planned to capture him. I thought it out, as well as I could. Perhaps I should have informed you, at once, Commissaire. But I feared! A terrible responsibility! If our collusion was known, Monsieur Edouard might die. For, of course, I hoped and still hope that he lives. So I thought perhaps I might capture this bandit. But he was too ferocious. He came at me like a madman!"

Saturnin turned again to the dead man and looked at the face which wore an air of astonishment. The Commissaire knelt once more and began to search the pockets.

A jangling bell sounded and Brigadier Flach came quickly downstairs. "An ambulance is here, Commissaire."

Saturnin nodded.

"We will go. Monsieur Neveux, I shall ask you to come with us to Headquarters. There are formalities we cannot avoid, eh. A statement in proper order, and so forth."

He took papers and bank notes from the dead man's pockets, looked quickly at them and then rose.

Paul Neveux's face was cold and imperturbable as ever, though possibly a shade paler.

"I am at your service, Commissaire," he said.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: SAIL AND FAREWELL

"None but the dead come back."—LOUIS BLANC

THE great ship dwarfed everything around her, making the customs-sheds look like doll's houses and automobiles appear as toys. It was a dull, misty afternoon, threatening early darkness, but all about the pleasure-ship gaiety reigned, in so far as human ingenuity, enterprise and spirit could compass such emotion. A challenge was flung at a rain-dimmed, nervous and legitimately apprehensive world. The challenge showed in a blaze of electric clusters which made the name, *Arlésienne*, shine before all men. Promise of comfort lay in the several gangways, covered and hooded in canvas tunnels, and running from dripping quays to dry, immaculate passenger decks. Promise not only of comfort but of joy, to all such citizens, republicans, democrats, socialists and the rest, who possessed the money for a *cruise-de-luxe*. Here plainly was man's conquest of nature and the ultimate triumph of science and technology. The ship with her turbines and oil-fuelling, her sounding by device of echo, her elevators and restaurants, her multitudinous steering-gears and safety-devices, her armies of sailors and stewards visible, her cohorts of firemen and greasers invisible. Science gave it all; courage, patient research, imagination and wit, dash and adventure gave it all—for money. Here an automobile glided to within three metres of a gangway. The pale mistress was assisted to descend, a pekingese was aided and encouraged, the maid leaped joyously, under her own power. Masters and mistresses, valets and maids, pets of pedigree and pride, chauffeurs and porters, luggage, rugs, straps, the book of the month, magazines, baskets of fruit, flowers, parting gifts superfluous yet well-meaning (for what can Money give Money?), adieus, cordial or merely polite: lovers embracing, *partir, c'est mourir un peu*; wives separated from their husbands, business-men torn from their typists; parties to see off a favourite star of stage, screen or radio; champagne opened in cabins and saloons; a coming and going, an intense and intoxicating feeling of adventure.

Here, says the fair *Arlésienne*, is mist and cold, rain and dirty puddles, business and cares, troubles old and new: but I shall carry you to blue seas and to white cities flashing beneath the sun; I will show you the bowed oxen carting the wine, the flying-fish darting across the waves with the flashing bonita in pursuit; I offer music and silken dalliance under the Southern Cross, and sights of palm-fringed isles, whilst all the time attentive stewards fill your bath, arrange your sports, wait upon you with soup and ice-cream, with wines and delicacies you have never before encountered. Marvellous modern world where all is achieved and everything won—for money.

.

In a little smoke-room, elegant, with glass and shining metal and

floored with rubber, Saturnin Dax and Brigadier Felix Norman sat at a small table. Between the Commissaire's mobile lips hung a cigarette. Before him on the table was a small glass containing *armagnac*, there being no *marc* available. Felix Norman drank mineral water with some austerity and derived comfort from his calabash. This smoke-room, situated aft, on the boat-deck, was empty and had not yet been discovered by the invading travellers, who had their hands full, with luggage, friends, servants and stewards, on the lower decks.

Felix glanced at the single steward, who, behind his bar, seemed to be examining an account book.

"In another twenty minutes," said Felix, "the ship is supposed to sail. I believe they keep their time, too."

Saturnin grunted. He sipped, with moderate approval, his *armagnac*. Felix sighed.

"Great life these people have, what? To-morrow night, or the next day, they'll be in the Bay of Biscay."

"You'd be sick," said the Commissaire.

A man looked in at a door of the saloon and immediately withdrew his head tortoise-fashion. He was a large man with tightly-buttoned, double-breasted overcoat, and a clipped, military moustache.

"Do you know," said Felix, "I think it's not a bad idea to take one's holidays in the winter."

"A holiday is always a good idea," said Saturnin.

"But what I mean is, most people go away in the summer when every place is crowded, and then return to work all through the winter, and probably get colds and grippe. To holiday down south in the winter would be to escape winter; wipe it off the calendar. And the summer isn't bad in Paris. There's the Bois, and tennis, and bathing-places."

Saturnin finished his *armagnac* and looked at his watch.

"Conversation is an art," he said. "Probably failing, like all the arts. I met a man years ago who was interesting only when he talked about elephants. Military officer—retired. Sterling qualities, but of an appalling dullness. Unless one mentioned elephants; and I always did. Then, he was really fine! The different elephants, Indian and African. The price of ivory, and how it affected the hunter. The working elephant; the rogue elephant. The laws regarding the shooting of elephants in Portuguese East, and elsewhere. The possible extinction of elephants. Hannibal. War elephants. How Hannibal trained 'em. . . . Well, the worthy Colonel came to live near me, and, if I ever should write a book—if ever I should so far forget decency and restraint, and set pen to paper, I . . ."

The Commissaire ceased abruptly as the dark face of Georges Alder showed at a Judas-hole let into the saloon door. Saturnin Dax rose, nodded to the steward, and went out followed by Felix Norman.

"Well, Georges?"

"Cabin 68, C deck," said Georges Alder. "He came on board with Dr. Allard. No one else. There are only two gangways down now. All are watched."

"Good!"

The Brigadier Alder went quickly, but without particular sign of haste, along the boat-deck and down a companion-ladder. The other two followed him. On the passenger-decks, wide as they were, the going was not easy. Each traveller appeared to have at least half a dozen to speed the departure. Many of the great wooden deck-chairs were down, and some already occupied by pale-faced voyagers. The invalid was fairly common amid the throng, but also there were plenty of hearty pleasure-seekers, though few were really young.

Georges Alder threaded his way along the decks with their congested groups, and turned unerringly in at a door and down carpetted, electric-lit stairs. As the three police-officers passed they were eyed inquisitively by a tiny minority of unoccupied and exceptionally observant passengers, to whom the clothes of these purposeful men, especially those of Saturnin and Georges, were aberrant.

"A great place to get lost in," muttered the Commissaire. "Good work, Georges."

For Alder, after descending staircases, crossing saloons, twisting and turning through interminable corridors, had pointed to metal fingers and letters plainly marked against a bulkhead. It was indicated that Cabin 68, of C. Deck was in the section of corridor before them. They were soon aware that the door of this cabin stood wide open, and hooked back. Dr. Allard, in overcoat and bowler hat, stood within a luxurious, single-berth cabin. Without coat or hat, in a tasteful suit of brown, with tie, handkerchief and socks to match, Guy Lorrain was smoking a Russian cigarette.

"Well," the doctor was saying. "I don't want to be shanghai'd, I think that's the term. . . . So I'll be going, Guy."

He shook hands, and, turning, saw Saturnin Dax.

"Ah, Commissaire. You have come to see our friend off?"

The doctor looked surprised, in a mild way.

"Or are you travelling yourself, perhaps?"

"No such luck, doctor. I was here on business, and learning that Monsieur Lorrain was also aboard, I thought I'd have a word with him before he sailed."

"I see. Well, there is only five minutes, so I will wish you, Good day." Dr. Allard made his exit, with a little bow that embraced Felix as much as Saturnin, but missed Georges Alder who had melted away out of sight.

Saturnin and Felix stepped into the cabin and met Guy Lorrain's anxious eyes set in a pale, haggard face.

"Well, well!" said Saturnin cheerfully. "Wonderful cabin! They do these things well, to-day, eh? Regular bed. Writing desk. Windows. Marvellous! Quite a little drawing-room, as well as a bedroom. And a bath!"

He moved about, making an inspection. In doing so he was out of sight from the doorway, and Felix also manoeuvred into a similar position.

"You . . . you want to speak to me, Commissaire ?" said Guy Lorrain.

His hands were trembling. He dropped his cigarette into an ash-tray, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"I just heard you were aboard," said Saturnin easily. "Came along to wish you *bon voyage*. Madame Prad said farewell in Paris, I suppose ?"

"No," said Guy, nervously. "No. She . . . she went to London, yesterday. With her father."

He licked his lips and grinned at them.

"The old man is a millionaire, no ? Estelle does not wish to quarrel with him. Otherwise she would have taken this trip. It is a bore. To go alone. But I need a change, sea air, a rest. Dr. Allard says so. The awful affair of my poor father's kidnapping and murder . . . Or, at least, his death. I . . . I am not made for such shocks, Commissaire."

"Evidently."

Saturnin was still looking about him, with a somewhat naïve wonder at the ingenuity with which engineers had economised every inch of space and bestowed gifts of luxurious ease in quarters that might so well have been cramped and ugly.

"Well, Monsieur Lorrain, you will no doubt make friends on board, during the trip. One does, so easily, *n'est-ce-pas* ? And who knows, you might easily meet an old friend, eh ?"

Saturnin's voice was casual enough, but the face of Guy Lorrain became so deadly white that Felix thought he was about to faint.

"Old . . . old friend . . . ?" he stammered.

"Why not ?" said Saturnin, cheerfully. "So many people nowadays . . ."

He broke off for there came a sharp rap of knuckles, somewhere on the bulkhead beside the open door.

"What . . . what was that ?" Guy Lorrain's voice rose shrilly.

"A steward perhaps."

Saturnin flashed a look at Felix, and the next moment a man stepped into the cabin.

"Guy," he said, in a low voice ; and then he stopped.

"Ah ! You have friends ?"

The man was tall, clean shaven and wore gold-rimmed spectacles. He looked inquiringly at Saturnin, who raised his hat and stepped forward a pace.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing, Monsieur Robert Organd ?" said Saturnin. "Am I wrong in thinking I have seen you in Pont de Lys ?"

"Organd ?"

The be-spectacled man's voice became harsh. He dropped one hand into an overcoat pocket.

"You are mistaken, monsieur. You have the advantage of me."

"Yes. I hope so. I should have said Monsieur Edouard Lorrain, no ?"

The question so paralysed Felix Norman that he was thrown for a horrible moment off his guard. In that moment Edouard Lorrain tried to pull a pistol from his pocket, but it appeared to catch in the lining. Saturnin jumped forward as the shot came, and so escaped death by a few millimetres. The next moment old Lorrain was held firmly, by Saturnin and Felix, whilst Georges Alder entered the cabin and closed the door.

"All right," panted the old man. "All right. I surrender. Look to my son."

Handcuffs were now upon the father's wrists. The son lay face downwards upon the floor in a dead faint.

"Tell them to hold a gangway, Georges," said Saturnin. "We don't want a fuss, but two passengers are not making the trip."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: SATURNIN DAX REVEALS

"Why should good hours of sunlight be wasted on the judgement seat by those who, presently, will have to take their turn in the dock.—BARON CORVO (FR. ROLFE).

COMMISSAIRE SATURNIN DAX entered the office of the Chief of Judicial Police and found him arranging a bunch of violets in a bowl upon his desk.

"Edouard Lorrain is dead," Saturnin announced. "But he made and signed a full confession."

"Ah! The Chief raised his finely arched eyebrows.

"A peculiar animal. I used to meet him, occasionally, years ago. Socially, I mean. Posed as a reformer, if I remember right. Credit should be nationalised, and prices democratically controlled. Some visionary nonsense! I'd have listened more carefully had I known he was an old pirate capable of shooting down three or four men in a night! Interesting. Split personality. Schizophrenia—do they call it ?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Saturnin shrugged and seated himself.

"Aren't we all split personalities ? There's enough in this epoch to split anyone! Edouard Lorrain was under examination for several weeks. A remarkable man. As you say, a pirate. But other things, too—if only potentially. I don't think we need regard his earlier theories and idealistic preachings as mere pose. Too elaborate. Too sustained and consistent. Rather we may imagine that his idealism was a luxury which he subsequently discovered he was unable to afford. So he threw ideals overboard. He became what is now called a realist!"

"He certainly did !"

The Chief separated from the large bunch of violets a smaller nosegay which he put into his button-hole.

"I suppose, after all, the bank was in a bad way, though the fact was well concealed?"

Saturnin nodded.

"The bank was in low water when old Prad died. Inquiries seem to show that old Prad died more or less of worry. Edouard Lorrain then tried some audacious coups, and made things worse. Quite a lot worse. So much so that he was faced not merely with more or less honourable bankruptcy, but actual criminal prosecution. . . By law, bankers must have a certain percentage of collateral security against money out on loan, and so forth. I don't quite . . ."

"Yes. Evidently. An elementary precaution. Society must protect itself."

The Chief inhaled the odour of his violets and Saturnin smiled with a peculiar twitch of the lips.

"Perfectly. Self-preservation. Until 1914 it was considered the first law of nature, *n'est-ce-pas*? Well, Edouard Lorrain wished to protect himself. And his son. The confession clears Guy Lorrain of any major crime. But he may suffer, without our help. For, whether his bank will survive or not, is difficult to say. Perhaps it depends on the lady, Madame Prad. Or on her millionaire father's vigorous will. Anyway, providing there is no fresh fraud we are not concerned."

Saturnin lit a cigarette. The Chief picked up a pencil and began to draw strange beasts upon a clean, white blotter.

"It will be serious if the bank smashes," he observed. "We have had quite enough of that in France."

"The matter is being investigated. Not my line of country. But I think there will be no serious smash."

"So much the better. Murder is bad enough. The ruin of thousands is worse. Perhaps, after all, our pirate drew sophistical moral encouragement from the thought that he was fighting to prevent loss to so many poor people. The criminal mind works that way, no? The moral murderer, like Jack the Ripper—a true English type—but might be French too?"

Saturnin rose, to stretch his legs and to enjoy the view of the river glistening in the afternoon sun, with gulls flashing and flapping against a cold blue sky, and small, fussy craft thrusting their way and the plane trees curtsying to the breeze.

"Edouard Lorrain," said the Commissaire. "Was actuated principally by two motives: an overwhelming and not quite normal love for his weak son; and, secondly, the knowledge that he himself was likely to die speedily."

"Ah, yes. This blood-pressure. . . Yes, the old pirate was not playing entirely for his own hand."

"By no means. It is very unlikely that the old fellow would care a sou what people thought of him, alive or dead. But his wife died young and left an only son. For that son there was not much

Edouard would not do. The bank had to be saved. Paul Neveux was ready enough and would run any reasonable risk provided there was sufficient recompense. A directorate, a controlling share, these things looked good to the former manager, a young man still, and one of enormous ambition and quite a bit of talent. He saw himself handling the weak son easily and so becoming virtually the head of the Lorrain-Prad Bank. In this affair, which is one of brilliant amateur criminality and opportunism, character is most important. Edouard was pretty certain he could rely on his promoted manager. He also thought Stephane Prad would prefer a little crime to insolvency. But, curiously enough, the younger Prad, though so adventurous, had a curious sense of honour. He disliked swindling. He did not even approve of murder. So Edouard had a set-back. A dangerous one. In feeling his way with Stephane Prad the old banker probably hinted at too much of the truth. Perhaps he actually said too much."

"Interesting! "

The Chief glanced up, momentarily, from his art-work. "One would certainly have calculated otherwise. The Neveux animal looks the perfect correspondence-course pupil. The successful executant of punctual habit and complete trustworthiness. Whilst the younger Prad, who ran away from home and joked at things sacred to the pillars of society—well! "

Saturnin joined in sympathetically with his Chief's grimace and smile.

"Just so. And Edouard saw that clearly enough. He himself had been deceived by the prodigal son's reputation, by the careless demeanour and reckless disregard for business dignity. So, being a man with a touch of genius in his make-up, old Edouard saw how to turn defeat into victory. Prad had turned him down. He would use Prad's unconventional conduct, scapegrace reputation, and mysterious past history. At all events Prad would not betray a confidence, even if it were in his power to do so; and probably Edouard never quite gave himself away—not until he struck. Then, his plan to use Prad, comprised the laying of suspicion on his younger partner, supposing there should be any unfortunate suspicions aroused."

"Yes, yes! Really the old pirate had, as you say, genius."

"Some of its supposed attributes, anyway," agreed Saturnin.

He returned to his chair and lit a fresh cigarette.

"For example, we consider great economy of means a certain sign of a high order of talent. Consider Edouard's economy. He would hire a gang of safe-busters, expert in their line, but otherwise not intellectually brilliant. These men should produce authentic and unmistakable signs of burglary. As reward they should be promised marketable valuables from a safe. But they would never get these valuables. Old Edouard, formerly a duellist and a pretty shot with a pistol, would be stationed nearby. At a convenient moment he would appear, unexpectedly, and with a Mauser pistol shoot down the burglars. Why not? What did he risk? The honest banker defending the money of his clients! "

Note, once more, the extreme economy. Estelle Prad has got tired of her wild husband, whose sexual morality, as is often the case, was not on the level of his probity and honour in other affairs. Estelle, in her thirties, had fallen for young Lorrain, a lady-killer of repute in certain quarters. I fear that this fascination—this attachment—appears to our young Brigadier Norman as something both incredible and morbid. I fear so. But that can't be helped. Facts are facts, however unacceptable. Estelle did love Guy. He was attracted by her. The lady went so far as to hire a private inquiry agent to watch her husband. This man, Chartrettes, discovered easily enough that Prad ran a mistress in a little villa at St. Remi. And Edouard Lorrain discovered the same thing. Here then was a plan of the most economical. To arrange the deaths of Prad and his mistress and to make the affair look like a suicide pact. The lady had little money and was an impulsive if not hysterical type. She had once tried to commit suicide. As for Stephene Prad, he, too, had a reputation for recklessness. The thing then should be easy. And with Prad out of the way Guy would be free to marry Estelle, whose fortune would save the Bank, or at least Guy himself. Altruism here, you see. The father fighting for the son. A little drug in the coffee; charcoal burned in the room; appropriate Shakespeare in the dead man's hand; his keys showing a faint sign of wax . . . It should have been successful. But—these brilliant amateurs! He placed his suicide-note too high on the door. He used a suspicious English—*Attention*—in his block-capitals. He used the wrong ink. The note was unsigned. It did not altogether convince. And the murderer had the misfortune to be seen by Emile Chartrettes, who should have left that job long before, but who was now working a little on his own at St. Remi with blackmail in his mind."

"You say 'he,' Commissaire. Do you think Edouard Lorrain carried out these second murders single-handed?"

"Well, no—perhaps not."

Saturnin meditatively thumbed his moustache to left and right.

"I should say Paul Neveux played his part at St. Remi. I feel that otherwise he might not have been so ready to murder Chartrettes when, later on, he tried blackmail. Unless I am much mistaken, that will bring our friend, Neveux, to the guillotine. The amateur again! He had no idea we could prove that the gun with which he shot Marengo was the same that fired into the spine of Chartrettes. As a rule such scientific evidence is not favoured by juries, but we have so many other things against Monsieur Neveux."

"Good! *Tant mieux*. And the lady? Do you think she had any part in her husband's taking off?"

"No. She is not that type. She played with the idea of getting a divorce. She was never keen on it. Had religious scruples. Old Edouard knew that. Also her millionaire father would be likely to disinherit her if she obtained divorce. And, though rich, she wanted more, like most rich people. So Edouard had another

reason for arranging the decease of Prad. Guy could not depend upon his powers to persuade the lady to divorce her husband."

"I see. So once more the old pirate's schemes were largely failures. I suppose, then, he decided to fake his own kidnapping?"

"Yes. Again we have the same brilliant touch, even if the scheme was a little unsound. And the same economy of means to achieve several ends. Remember Edouard Lorrain was medically condemned to death. He wished, at all costs, to save himself from shame and exposure until, at least, Guy was safely married to Estelle. By disappearing, as a victim of kidnappers, Edouard hoped to accomplish several different purposes. Firstly, he would get away to a new though short life under another name—that of Robert Organd. He hoped to shake off and possibly deceive the would-be avenger, Luis Marengo, who, once recovered from his wound, might be calculated to appear on the war-path. Also, as a kidnapped victim, Edouard could write to his son heart-rending appeals for money, which money would come in useful. Also his tragic departure would not cause a run on his bank, as some other kind of departure might well do."

"*Mes aieux*. It was clever!"

Saturnin shrugged

"In a way, partly. It has various weaknesses. The chief one was that Guy was not up to his part. This time, no doubt, he was told the truth, and the whole scheme terrified him. I had the ransom money marked, which made it useless to Edouard. Guy's nerve went, and he flew to drugs. He might have done worse, for this facilitated Neveux taking a hand, and he is a bird of a different feather. Money, unmarked, was appropriated by Guy, before he broke down; and he told a tale of bandits who snatched it from him when he met a car on a lonely road. It was not very convincing. Neveux did better. He came to tell a tale of enormous kidnapper's demands which could not be paid. Of course, no very large sum could be appropriated, for, if it got into the newspapers, a run on the bank might start, the very thing Edouard feared most! So Neveux came with his story and the severed finger in the cigarette-tin. Turmac cigarettes, such as Chartrettes smoked. The artistic and altruistic father again. Anxious to depart from this world, or at least provide convincing evidence that he had departed. Resolution there, Oriental type. An annoyed Japanese will send an indignant letter and enclose a severed finger to prove he means what he says. Edouard also meant business."

"He shrank from nothing, eh? The wonder is he did not make himself Minister of Finance, years ago! All the qualities are shown, surely?"

"A little too flashy and brilliant. Too much instability. Of course, we must pay him the tribute of remembering that, after the bank-vault affair went a little wrong, and Marengo got out alive, then our old pirate was forced into improvisation."

"Evidently. And brilliant improvisation, too!"

"But always a little unsound." Guy could not play his very difficult part. The young man made mistakes, but most people would have done so. To come to an experienced police-officer with the story that your father has been kidnapped—that is not easy. Even when you have a letter in your father's handwriting to back you. A star of the Comedie Francaise might be unconvincing in the role, or at least might get tripped up."

"Yes. I should not like to tell such a story, knowing it to be false. Not to you, Commissaire, anyway."

The Chief smiled politely.

"The thing was too much for Guy Lorrain, in any case," said Saturnin. "The event, coming on top of other events connected with the Lorrain Prad Bank, appeared too much of a coincidence. Kidnapping is not common here. That being so, the suggestion was made that American gangsters were at work in France. But how convenient, if Edouard wished to vanish. And some half-formed notion which would fit such a happening had been in my mind from the very start."

"Indeed! Truly?"

"The almost miraculous shooting of the dead watchman struck me forcibly," said Saturnin. "Maurice and Jean Rolla were shot dead with great accuracy. One shot to each. Slap through their foreheads. At more than twenty metres range. And a third man hit and wounded. Not impossible, of course. But the man who was supposed to have shot so well was himself fired at and hit by three criminals. Degray had five shots put into him. Yet he had time and the necessary coolness to kill two of his assailants and wound a third. From the first I looked around for an alternative explanation. True Degray's finger-prints were on the Mauser which killed the Rolla brothers. But could not that Mauser have been slipped into dead fingers? Unfortunately, I could not trace the Mauser. Degray's brother, Pierre, did not know what sort of gun his brother used. But he had also never heard of Albert as a remarkable pistol-shot, and that rather suggested the watchman possessed no such special talent. My first notion was that possibly four crooks, at least, took part in the burglary. After being surprised by Degray, and killing him, there might have been a row. In which an unknown, with Mauser, killed the Rollas, who carried Steyr and Roth guns, and wounded the fellow who escaped and who had presumably fired a Spanish Victoria. However, this notion, though plausible, received no support from any evidence subsequently discovered. Then there was Guy Lorrain's appearance on that Sunday morning. One must admit that the old pirate was greatly handicapped by the fact that Guy took after his gentle mother. When I saw Guy's face I knew something was very wrong. Something more than a robbery and loss to be made good by insurance. So I at once began to ask myself whether the bank-directors might have wanted to stage a robbery. If so, crooks might have fallen out, over the murder of a watchman, or over the loot.

And one crook might have been heavily bribed to kill his associates—to avoid questions of blackmail. Once one began to think along such lines it was not difficult to visualise something very close to the actual happenings. Then came the faked suicide of Prad and his little mistress. And the alleged kidnapping of old Edouard. It was all very suggestive. Francois Jesick, who, but for an accident, would have been one of the burglars, knew more than he would admit. So did Emile Chartrettes, who had a reputation for rather specializing in blackmail. He wanted me to suspect Estelle Prad. So whom did he wish to shield—and blackmail? He called at the Bank. He was given money. Later, Chartrettes was clever enough to slip those watching him: and he was murdered. One could see the pattern of the affair taking shape."

"Yes . . . And the Spanish fellow? He kept very quiet?"

"He foolishly neglected his wound and had a bad time in consequence. That was one reason for his lying low. Then Luis Marengo was very badly wanted in Barcelona, and elsewhere. Murder charges. He had to move carefully. He knew Jesick was watched. The only trustworthy accomplice Marengo had was a Chinaman, Charlie Sing. He was steward on a boat. Charlie did well in the opium racket. Not a bold criminal type. But Marengo had to use the material to hand. He wanted Charlie, and waited for his ship to return. Marengo, by the way, suspected the whole truth from the beginning. He saw something I did not see until much later."

"Ah. . . ?"

The Chief's eyebrows were raised quizzically.

"The canvas hood," explained Saturnin. "The man who entered that cellar with the Mauser pistol naturally wished to conceal his features. Someone might get away alive: we know someone did. But, to hide one's face a mask only is necessary. Why wear a hood which covers all the head, and falls to the shoulders in loose folds? Answer, because the wearer has a flowing beard to hide, in addition to the usual eyes, nose and mouth."

"Yes, yes. You saw the truth then, when that lamp-post was broken and the contents of the condemned letter-box were brought to light?"

"It confirmed my suspicions. And the revolver, loaded with blanks. One could obtain more light on poor Degray's marksmanship, and see how he was sent to his death. Degray's finger-prints were on the revolver. There were no finger-prints at all on the canvas hood. The old pirate was careful about detail—where he thought of it. But Marengo knew from the first who was the hooded man in that bank-vault. He set Charlie Sing on to rob Estelle Prad's house, during a party. How much Estelle might or might not know, Marengo could not say. But, obviously, neither Estelle nor Guy would worry Marengo, and Charlie happened to have a brother in service at the house. This gave me another illuminating clue. What Marengo and Charlie thought they might

find I can't say. But Charlie stole from the Avenue Kleber a piece of jewellery already supposed to have been stolen from the Bank. A favourite plaque of diamonds and emeralds. Guy had foolishly returned it to the lady, who was possibly a little annoyed at losing her property. Anyway, when I regained her stuff she attempted for one moment to repudiate the plaque. She made a sort of recovery, saying she had been selling or exchanging stuff lately. But she had slipped. I had further confirmation that the bank-robbery, like the Prad suicide and the banker-kidnapping, was a fake. So we were gradually getting our net round the various actors, guilty, half-guilty and innocent, in this drama. The murder of Prad brought us to traces of Chartrettes, and his murder led us to Pont de Lyss and the mysterious Robert Organd and to his motor-cycling friend, who, of course, is Paul Neveux. Daily, we get more and more evidence against Neveux. We find his finger-prints in the villa rented by Edouard Lorrain at Pont de Lyss. We have discovered a motor-bike and side-car owned by Neveux. In his apartment we have found many incriminating things, including evidence which leads us to a safe-deposit where he placed the negotiable securities supposed to have been stolen by burglars from the Lorrain-Prad Bank. No. Old Edouard's refusal to implicate Neveux will not help that ambitious young man. One murder is enough; the killing of Chartrettes, which we shall prove against Neveux. The other conspiracies we may ignore. Of course he was the motor-cyclist who held up Edouard's car and helped to knock out that poor chauffeur, Bert Williams, a lonely Englishman abroad. Probably it was Edouard himself who administered the blow on the back of his chauffeur's head, after calling out, in feeble tones, for help."

The Chief laughed, and then quickly frowned.

"An old pirate!" he reiterated.

"Fortunately, the son was not up to paternal standards and requirements. We could, of course, get the unfortunate Guy for conspiracy of one kind and another. I don't think we need follow that up. If we do so we certainly smash any hopes the Lorrain-Prad Bank may have of survival, and so ruin thousands. Also one may feel a little sorry for Guy Lorrain, whatever views we may hold upon lilac ties and hair smarmed down with toilet-water. Undoubtedly conspiracy and murder were abruptly thrust upon Guy after the primary *fait accompli* of his father. He must either conceal facts, or betray his parent to the guillotine. Guy probably knew as little as his father could contrive, and was told nothing unnecessarily, and then as vaguely as practicable."

"Yes. . ." said the Chief, dubiously. "The chief point is, the Bank and its clients. If Madame Prad is putting in money to save her lover it seems a pity to spoil the gesture. If possible we want to avoid any more bank smashes. Also, if the father has declared himself solely to blame, it seems a little vindictive to pursue the son, who certainly had nothing to do with murder. I have met

Guy Lorrain socially. I can't imagine him murdering a caterpillar. Then again, I'm not even sure we could prove his complicity in anything really serious. You yourself think the burglary affair was sprung on him after it had happened. The faked kidnapping: well, after all, that was his father's attempt to save himself; and the old man was dying. Even if we could prove Guy's knowledge and complicity a good counsel would get him a very light sentence, and we shouldn't show up well. No. I fancy we must think of the Bank and its correspondents. I understand that this new bank-manager is a good man, and a live-wire. He will do everything possible to avoid a run on the bank, whatever stuff gets into the newspapers. A first-class firm of auditors are now going over the books and their report will be published. A smash may be avoided. The insurance company that paid for the faked robbery is as anxious as anyone else not to cause a crisis."

Saturnin smiled a little cynically.

"Splendid!" he said. "I agree it would be a pity if Madame Prad's money were wasted. As old Edouard once said to me, 'the business of bestowing credit where credit is due is a delicate affair.' Let us hope the credit of the Lorrain-Prad Bank will survive any crisis that may come along."

"I rather think it will," said the Chief. "The securities supposed to have been stolen are included as assets with the knowledge and consent of the insurance people who are promised repayment in full. They know they won't get that if they precipitate a crisis. Also, of course, the ransom-money has all, or practically all, fallen into our hands."

"Yes. Another example of Edouard's neat economy of methods," said Saturnin. "He knew that he dared not use, as Robert Organd, the money our technical laboratory had marked. Sooner or later we would trace it to him. So he told Neveux to conceal a lot of this marked money in the automobile of the dead Chartrettes. We found it in an old tyre. We were supposed to believe Chartrettes a member of a kidnapping gang whom he had double-crossed and robbed and who had ironed him out."

"Neat! There was the chewing-gum and the *New York Herald* in the car, no? Also Edouard sent his severed finger in a Turmac tin, and Chartrettes smoked such cigarettes?"

"Yes, but our inquiry-agent was not a violent type. Never would he join in with gangsters and American kidnappers. Women and erring husbands were more in Chartrettes's line. As a petty blackmailer he took his risks. For larger stakes he might take larger risks. But he kept pretty well within the law. Of course Edouard Lorrain didn't know that. And, as I have said, he was by this time improvising. A little desperately. On the whole his methods were sound. Having created a band of kidnappers let 'em do as much as possible. Allow Edouard's disappearance without damage to bank-credit; get useful, but not too large sums of money; function as the unknown killers of Chartrettes, for whom

the police may vainly search. Economy of method. Genius. But just a little unsound. Neveux himself was driven into a little similar improvisation ; and he was also unsound."

"Ah! You mean his killing of Luis Marengo, in that bar?"

"Yes. It was cool and daring. Neveux thought he'd be safe. He had only to say Marengo was one of the kidnapping gang, trying to extract money. We'd believe this, for Marengo was a bandit, actually. But unfortunately there were unknown difficulties for the amateur criminal. He knew nothing of ballistics. He didn't know we could prove the gun he used on Marengo was the same that killed Chartrettes. Awkward for Neveux. Fortunate for us, because the other crimes our rising young banker committed would not be easy to prove. By concentrating on the murder of Chartrettes, however, we shall have Paul Neveux where we want him."

There was silence in the room for a few moments. The Chief was playing with his pencil once more ; the light across the river was beginning to fail.

"Really," said the Chief, at length. "One has rather a sneaking regard and sympathy for old Lorrain. Almost one admires the old pirate. I knew him, socially. Undoubtedly he had courage, resource, intelligence and singleness of purpose. I wonder, by the way, where he got that finger amputated. Do you know?"

"I can guess," said Saturnin. "Our old friend, Doc Guilfoyle was in Monaco some time ago. He was seen and recognized in Beau Soleil. It was indicated to him that his health would fare better elsewhere."

"Guilfoyle . . . ? Ah, the American crook who practises the plastic surgery, and claims to be able to change a face out of recognition?"

"The same. He worked on Ramon Ortiz, you may remember."

The Commissaire rose and stared out of the window at a blazing orange sun.

"Well, I rather think Edouard Lorrain will have accomplished his main purpose. Even if the Bank is not saved from shipwreck, I fancy the adored son will be all right. It would be a pity otherwise. Six men and one woman have been killed, to our knowledge. A lady has been hit on the head, and also her Chinese servant. Another Chinaman shivers in gaol, but, I think we shall probably soon release him. However, several have died. Mostly criminals, better out of the way ; but the younger Prad was a live, gallant fellow, his mistress attractive and harmless. Yes—the old pirate had a good deal to answer for. But somehow, I don't see him wincing, whatever might confront him hereafter."

The westering sun seemed to expand in a last brilliance until the room was filled with a steady, flame-like glow.

"Yes," said the Commissaire. "He won—whoever else may have lost. A case of survival of the fittest, perhaps?"

